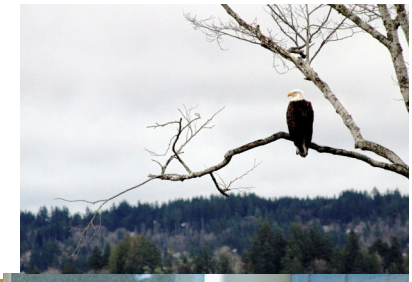
NHB/NMRTC Bremerton Medical Service Corps Legacy the Past Decade

There are [currently] approximately 30 MSC officers assigned to NMRTC Bremerton, providing expertise in 31 specialties of their three corps' branches - Clinical Care, Health Care Science, Health Care Administration - to help handle the daily responsibilities of supporting the daily demands in a military treatment facility.
"We represent the scientists, administrators and clinicians. We're not the doctors. We're not the nurses. We are the force multipliers. We're the heart of the hospital. We're the calm that keeps everything going. We make sure logistics are there, lab results are coming, and prescriptions are getting out," remarked Capt. Karla Lepore, Naval Hospital Bremerton director, NMRTC Bremerton commanding officer, as well as MSC officer and occupational therapist.



Flags, Folds, Farewells for NHB DFA

By Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer -- The guidon for Navy Medicine Readiness Training Command Bremerton's Directorate of Administration went missing recently.

Until it was hand delivered –in a framed display case - to a very surprised Capt. Maria Edusada, outgoing DFA director upon completing her final directorate uniform inspection, May 8, 2025.

"Wow! Thank you all. This is amazing," said Edusada, addressing the assembled active duty personnel.

Upon receiving her customized framed guidon from Hospital Corpsmen 1st Class Oscar Torres Ruiz and Zoe Fuleki, Master Chief Hospital Corpsman Joshua Akins explained "on behalf of your entire directorate, this is just a small token of appreciation. With added flair."

"It's bittersweet leaving our hospital," Edusada said, noting that for nearly three years she has appreciated the opportunity to work with her team.

"This command, this hospital, cannot function without our directorate. Without you. We have so many ranks, rates and specialties, we're involved in everything," stated Edusada.

With nearly 110 officer and enlisted personnel – augmented by approximately 50 civil service staff members - the DFA provides a wide array of crucial services for the military treatment facility, such as combined food operations, nutrition management and bachelor enlisted quarters, emergency management, facilities management, civilian human resources, active duty human resources, information management, material management, patient administration, staff education and training, and security.

It's been a week of sudden surprises for Edusada.

At the end of an award ceremony several days earlier, Logistics Specialist 2nd Class Gustavo Roldan Castillo, Hospital Corpsmen 2nd Class Kaden Bridges and Miracle Suzuki formed a flag detail.

Edusada was unexpectedly requested to step forward before the command.

"I know everything that goes on around here. How this got planned without me knowing…" openly wondered Edusada.

"Capt. Edusada is an important figure to our NMRTC Bremerton family. She is getting ready to embark on a new adventure. The entire DFA directorate would like to send her off with a special flag and ceremony, consisting of a special rendition of the 13 folds," read Atkins, acting as master of ceremony.

The trio of Sailors proceeded to ceremoniously fold the Directorate for Administration flag, emblematic of the Medical Service Corps in its inception August 4, 1947.

The MSC has historically been recognized as the most distinctive Navy Medicine corps, comprised of health care administrators, clinicians and scientists in 31 specialties.

Each fold represented a symbolic – and historical significance - of the MSC, including "The first fold honoring the creation of the U.S. Navy Medical Service Corps, born out of the pharmacist mates' specialty."

The second fold honored the 251 officers who were commissioned in the MSC.

The fourth fold recognized the initial contributions of the MSC during the post-World War II period.

After the war, the Navy MSC began building a more robust medical system, supporting military hospitals and providing care to veterans, laying the foundation for modern Navy Medicine.

The sixth fold remembered the MSC role during the Korean War, where they provided frontline surgical care, refined mobile hospitals, and perfected helicopter evacuation, significantly improving the survival rate of soldiers and Marines wounded in combat.

The seventh fold honored the pivotal role of the MSC in the Vietnam War. The use of clinicians in mobile surgical teams and forward-deployed trauma units set the stage for modern military medicine, saving lives through innovative trauma care protocols.

Other folds honored the MSC commitment to undersea medicine, preventive medicine, multiple scientific and research disciplines and many clinical fields.

The folded flag was then presented to Edusada from recently retired Senior Chief Hospital Corpsman Arlene Alonzo, as a favor returned after having Edusada as the presiding officer at her retirement ceremony.

Although her myriad duties at NMRTC Bremerton are coming to an end, Edusada is still acting as a Medical Service Corps specialty leader for her entire corps and her multi-tasking ability will continue to personify the MSC flag.

One fold at a time.

I Am Navy Medicine – and MSC – assigned to NHB/NMRTC Bremerton

By Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer -- The Peruvian coastal capital of Lima is approximately 4,970 miles south of Naval Hospital Bremerton.

Yet Lt. Renzo D. Sobrevilla has seamlessly bridged that distance from South American to North America as a Navy Medical Service Corps officer assigned to NHB.

Sobrevilla—who started from humble beginnings to embark upon his chosen career path—notes his responsibility at NHB is dedicated to ensuring that the right material, contracted services and healthcare equipment are in the right place at the right time to provide medical and dental care to active duty, retirees and their families at NHB and three branch health clinics.

“As an immigrant, I always encourage my Sailors to take full advantage of the opportunities the Navy provides. Starting as an E-1 and working my way up, I've seen firsthand how hard work, dedication, and motivation can turn the American dream into reality. Becoming an MSC officer was a pivotal moment for me and proof that with the right attitude, anyone can succeed,” remarked Sobrevilla,

His interest in Navy Medicine began after he enlisted in the Navy in 2007. Several influential leaders set the foundation for him to pursue a career in the medical field. After completing his Bachelor of Science in Finance and Accounting from Northeastern University, Sobrevilla merged his growing healthcare interest with leadership and chose the Navy’s most diverse corps, MSC, which offers a number of healthcare administrator specialties.

“The Navy Medical Service Corps appealed to me because of its commitment to diversity and inclusivity. This career has allowed me to work in various settings, each contributing to the mission of Navy Medicine,” shared Sobrevilla, NHB Materiel Management Department head, who has been part of Navy Medicine since 2016 and served in various roles, including as a plans, operations, and medical Intelligence officer, comptroller, and logistics officer.

Sobrevilla epitomizes the value of education, having attained his Master of Healthcare Administration with Executive Concentration, Specialization in Management, Education and Training Management, and Healthcare Management from George Mason University. He is currently completing his dissertation for his Doctor of Business Administration at Grand Canyon University.

He can also add linguistic chops to a growing curriculum vitae.

“Thanks to my parents' heritage, I am bilingual in Italian and Spanish,” Sobrevilla added, noting that the best part of his career has been the opportunity to work with diverse people from all over the world. “There’s the sense of fulfillment that comes from making a positive impact in their lives through Navy Medicine.”

When asked to sum up his experience with Navy Medicine, Sobrevilla replied, “Navy Medicine has been a transformative journey, offering me the opportunity to grow both personally and professionally. It's a testament to the fact that with hard work and a strong work ethic, anything is possible.”

Recognizing the Core of the Medical Service Corps at NMRTC Bremerton

By Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer -- It's not too much of an imaginative stretch to envision a historical correlation between a military treatment facility and Navy Medicine's more distinctive health care corps.

In the ensuing years following the end of the Second World War, Navy Medicine continued to transform staff and structure, as well as care for those in need.

Just as the naval hospital located on then Puget Sound Naval Shipyard was an amalgam of temporary buildings being converted and revamped into permanent wards to better care for patients, the battlefields of WWII which were defining frontlines for Navy medical officers, became the nascent foundation for a new staff corps dedicated to medical readiness.

Some of those medical officers were those who found themselves confronted with a host of clinical concerns such as preventing debilitating diseases like malaria, dengue fever and tuberculosis. Others took on the responsibility to ensure crucial coordination for scientific developments like improved trauma treatment and enhanced blood transfusions. There were also those with medical logistic expertise in the vanguard helping distribute penicillin to Sailors and Marines with bacterial infections.

The Navy realized that such dedicated groups was necessary to effectively and efficiently respond to the myriad healthcare issues.

On August 4, 1947, the Medical Service Corps came into being.

From the initial 251 who were placed into four specialty groups of allied sciences, optometry, pharmacy, and supply/administration, the corps has grown to approximately 2,700 active duty, with another 750 reserve officers.

There are approximately 25 MSC officers assigned to Naval Hospital Bremerton. Many gathered on the command's quarterdeck to celebrate their birthday and honor their legacy with the traditional cake-cutting ceremony.

"I hope our cake is large enough for everyone here. But we're Medical Service Corps! We'll make it happen," Capt. Maria Edusada, NHB director of administration quipped in her opening remarks. "As our MSC chief, I am humbled and honored to lead such an amazing group of officers," "Not all our numbers could be here today due to providing care.

"From the battlefields to the hospitals, from research labs to the frontlines of public health, MSC has always been at the forefront of advancing military medicine," continued Edusada. "Our achievements are a testament to the hard work, resilience and dedication of each member of this extraordinary team. Our commitment and service have left an unprecedented mark on the history of the U.S. Navy and the care we provide."

"It makes me proud to be part of the MSC. Providing support to ensure patient care is very rewarding to me," shared Lt. j.g. David Tegtmeyer, NHB deputy chief information officer and operations management department head.

Tegtmeyer and others are proficient in 31 specialties which comprise three basic branches to handle all those many responsibilities throughout the many Navy Medicine hospitals, clinics and Navy fleet assets across the seven seas.

The Clinical Care specialties include audiology, clinical psychology, dietetics/food management, occupational therapy, optometry, pharmacy, physical therapy, physician assistant, podiatry, and social work.

The Health Care Science field encompasses aerospace experimental psychology, aerospace physiology, biochemistry, entomology, environmental health, industrial hygiene, medical technology, microbiology, physiology, radiation health, and research psychology.

Health Care Administration consists of education and training management, financial management, fleet marine force, general health care administration, health care facilities planning, information management, manpower systems analysis, medical logistics management, operations research, patient administration, and plans, operations and medical intelligence.

“Being part of the 77-year legacy of the Medical Service Corps is an honor. It means upholding a tradition of excellence, innovation, and dedication to service. I am proud to contribute to a legacy that has continuously evolved to meet the needs of the Navy and its personnel. I am committed to carrying that legacy forward,” exclaimed Ensign April M. White, NHB’s laboratory manager, division officer and master of ceremony for the birthday celebration.

Well-wishes were also shared from Rear Adm. Darin Via, U.S. Navy Surgeon General and Chief, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery and Rear Adm. Matthew Case, commander, Naval Medical Forces Atlantic, and chief, Medical Service Corps.

NMRTC Bremerton MSC officers also gathered for briefings on the state of their corps, as well as to discuss career planning.

“Looking ahead, we remain committed to our mission of providing the highest standard of medical care and support to our service members and their families,” stated Edusada. “With the same spirit of innovation and dedication that has guided us for the past 77 years, we will continue to push boundaries and set new standards in military medicine.”

UNCLASSIFIED//FOR OFFICAL USE ONLY
Navy Enlisted to Commissioning Programs
ENS April White, LTJG Alex Pinzas
Keeping our warfighters ready, healthy, and on the job

Sailors from a number of commands attended an Enlisted to Officer Mustang Rodeo to learn about available pathways to a commission. The fact-filled – and collaborative opportunity – event was held May 2, 2024.

There were breakout sessions which provided Sailors the opportunity to network with naval officers, including those who are known as mustangs, signifying they were prior enlisted before being commissioned.

The two-hour event began with a presentation discussing all the different pathways to a commission, before the aforementioned breakout sessions for each commissioning source. Over 13 naval officers of all designations and ranks participated as mentors. They answered questions and shared advice with the Sailors in a mentoring and educational setting.

“I came today to confirm if the research I’ve already completed about commissioning is current,” said Electricians Mate 2nd Class Anthony Montesano from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma with USS Nimitz (CVN 68).

In the military realm, the transition from enlisted to commissioned officer is considered by many to be a remarkable feat that accentuates both dedication and leadership potential. Challenges, sacrifices, ambition, and moments of profound growth often mark such a journey.

Ensign April White from Spotsylvania County, Virginia, Naval Hospital Bremerton Laboratory manager, led the coordination of this event, saying, “Our goal was for each Sailor to find an officer they can connect with and see themselves in following [their steps to commissioning].”

White entered the Navy as a hospital corpsman recruit in October 2006, and was commissioned in April 2023 into the Medical Service Corps as a medical laboratory scientist. She chose to be a medical laboratory scientist because it gave her continuity in the career field she was most familiar with, including a higher scope of responsibility and impact.

White said in reflection, “I love being a mustang. It allows me to use the experience and wisdom I’ve gained from going up the enlisted ranks to influence change, while molding future leaders through meaningful interactions and mentorship.”

Any currently enlisted man or woman can become a commissioned officer in the United States Armed Forces. Enlisted members who become officers can expect to continue advancing throughout their military careers

I Am Navy Medicine – and Medical Service Corps – assigned to NMRTC Bremerton

By Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer -- For 77 years – and counting – the Navy's Medical Service Corps has had the distinction of being known as Navy Medicine's most diverse corps, comprised of health care administrators, clinicians and scientists.

Lt. j.g. David Tegtmeyer is continuing that tradition.

Tegtmeyer, from Las Vegas, Nev., a Valley High School 2017 graduate and U.S. Naval Academy 2021 class alumni, is the deputy chief information officer and operations management department head assigned to Navy Medicine Readiness Training Command Bremerton.

"[I] Left Las Vegas for the academy because I wanted to be a naval officer. I went to flight school as a naval flight officer. It wasn't for me. So I looked towards other communities and found Navy Medicine," said Tegtmeyer, who chose his career path in Navy Medicine because of a specific opportunity.

"The chance to work in a CIO (chief information officer) role in a healthcare environment," affirmed Tegtmeyer, who helps oversee his command's Information Management Department, which handles managing information technology operations – from networks and information systems to the DoD's new electronic health record MHS GENESIS, which was initially deployed at his command in 2017 - needed for timely healthcare delivery to all eligible beneficiaries.

Tegtmeyer attests that his assigned responsibility is yet another ready example of how the Medical Service Corps is known as Navy Medicine's most diverse corps.

“My work contributes to that ideal every day. Within Information Management Department, it is our role to support the provider and ensure they have the tools to administer patient care. That means ensuring information technology equipment is functional, available for use and even for pursuing telehealth to reach more patients.”

“I have been able to expand my skill set since arriving,” continued Tegtmeyer, with a year in Navy Medicine. “I have been able to go to Walter Reed [National Military Medical Center] for service schools and attend the Defense Health Information Technology Symposium conference in New Orleans. I am waiting to see where I end up going next.”

The Information Management Department offers daily trials.

“The most challenging aspect is the sheer scope IT covers,” explained Tegtmeyer. “The multitude of different medical systems require their own specific set ups. This ends up requiring specialized skills and many work hours to make operational.”

Taking on those cyber challenges and helping provide the crucial support needed make the behind-the-scenes work all worthwhile.

“Seeing a clinic become operationally successful is the most gratifying aspect,” Tegtmeyer said. “This gives me the peace of mind that patients will be able to receive uninterrupted patient care.”

Despite the ongoing workload associated with his position, Tegtmeyer still found the time to take part in a 200-mile relay run with 11 other command members in 2023. He took on that challenge in the same way he did at work, by methodically putting in the necessary training to be prepared to take on the grueling two-day event.

“It was definitely a challenge. I was luckily able to embrace this specific endeavor. I greatly enjoy running and being outside so the event itself was extremely enjoyable, especially doing it with people from the command. The hard part was the discipline needed to train leading up to the event,” remarked Tegtmeyer.

Tegtmeyer is one of approximately 25 MSC officers assigned to NMRTC Bremerton. This August marks 77 years ago in 1947 for the corps to be officially established.

“It makes me proud to be part of the MSC. Providing support to ensure patient care is very rewarding to me,” shared Tegtmeyer.

Collectively they provide expertise in 31 specialties which comprise three basic branches to handle all those many responsibilities throughout the many Navy Medicine hospitals, clinics and Navy fleet assets across the seven seas.

The Clinical Care specialties include audiology, clinical psychology, dietetics/food management, occupational therapy, optometry, pharmacy, physical therapy, physician assistant, podiatry, and social work.

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The best part of Tegtmeyer career has been experiencing some of those different MSC opportunities.

“I have been able to explore multiple subspecialties which has given me exposure to different areas of the MSC community,” Tegtmeyer said.

When asked to sum up his experience with Navy Medicine as a Medical Service Corps officer in one sentence, Tegtmeyer replied, “We are here to support all aspects of patient care.”

Including putting in the work to make it happen.

I Am Navy Medicine – and Medical Service Corps – assigned to NMRTC Bremerton

By Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer -- For Ensign April M. White, becoming a Navy Medical Service Corps officer began during her initial duty station as a hospital corpsman.

The Fredericksburg, Virginia native transitioned into the laboratory community after being stationed at Lakehurst, New Jersey in 2008. She is currently Naval Hospital Bremerton's laboratory manager and division officer.

"I've been working in Navy Medicine for 18 years," said White, a Courtland High School 2005 alum and University of Incarnate Word 2021 graduate.

Helping manage the workload of NHB's Laboratory statistically helps explain the importance of her position. The total volume just the main hospital lab handled last year alone for hematology, urinalysis, coagulation, blood bank, point of care testing, microbiology and cytology/histology testing totaled approximately 435,750.

Much of what the lab does is completely out of sight of the direct patient care provided. Yet that direct patient care could not be delivered without the lab's support, which White ensures happens in a timely manner. It can be a challenge at times.

"The most challenging aspect of my position is managing the dynamic and often unpredictable nature of our operational requirements," explained White. "Balancing multiple priorities while ensuring the highest standards of care can be demanding. But it also drives continuous improvement and adaptability of my laboratory team."

White attests that there is fulfillment in her role and that of her lab team in performing the needed scientific testing and reporting the results to primary care managers as part of delivering timely care to patients.

"The most gratifying aspect of my position is witnessing our efforts' positive impact on service members' health and well-being. Knowing that our work directly contributes to the mission readiness and overall quality of life for those we serve is incredibly rewarding," stated White.

White is one of approximately 25 MSC officers assigned to NMRTC Bremerton, providing expertise in 31 specialties which comprise three basic branches – Health Care Administration, Clinical Care and Health Care Science - to handle myriad responsibilities throughout the many Navy Medicine hospitals and clinics across the seven seas.

Health Care Administration consists of education and training management, financial management, fleet marine force, general health care administration, health care facilities planning, information management, manpower systems analysis, medical logistics management, operations research, patient administration, and plans, operations and medical intelligence.

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The Health Care Science field encompasses aerospace experimental psychology, aerospace physiology, biochemistry, entomology, environmental health, industrial hygiene, medical technology, microbiology, physiology, radiation health, and research psychology.

The Medical Service Corps is long known as Navy Medicine's most diverse corps because of the dependable commitment by officers like White.

"My work contributes to the diversity of the Medical Service Corps by fostering an inclusive environment and leveraging our team's unique skills and perspectives. Collaborating with professionals from various backgrounds enhances our problem-solving capabilities and delivers comprehensive healthcare solutions," stated White, adding that being part of the MSC legacy which began August 4, 1947, has given her a meaningful sense of accomplishment.

"Being part of the 77-year legacy of Medical Service Corps is an honor. It means upholding a tradition of excellence, innovation, and dedication to service. I am proud to contribute to a legacy that has continuously evolved to meet the needs of the Navy and its personnel. I am committed to carrying that legacy forward," exclaimed White.

Corps to the Fore...Navy Medical Service Corps take a collective pause for their group photo in celebrating and honoring the birth of their established date, August 4, 1947...

I Am Navy Medicine – & new Navy MSC officer – Lt. j.g. Catherine Basiga

By Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer -- Even before Catherine L. Basiga had risen through the U.S. Navy enlisted ranks to become a hospital corpsman first class, she knew.

She knew that preparation, proficiency and perseverance would help her just as she continued to help others.

Basiga's 10-year career is continuing on an ascendant angle being commissioned as a Navy Medical Service Corps officer with the rank of lieutenant junior grade, June 3, 2024.

She was selected last year via the MSC In-Service Procurement Program, which provides a pathway to an officer commission for career motivated active duty enlisted personnel like Basiga, in pay grades E-5 through E-9, who meet the eligibility criteria defined.

"I had leaders who allowed me to learn and experience different jobs within and outside my rating in the dental and medical treatment facilities, state-side and oversea locations. Through these experiences, I became confident in my leadership and administrative skills, which spiked my interest to pursue the path and continue my career as a healthcare administrator in Navy Medicine," said Basiga, from Davao City, Philippines,

She joined the Navy in 2012 from San Jose, California, with a Bachelor of Science in Commerce major in Management Accounting, Ateneo de Davao University, Philippines, adding to that with graduate level work in obtaining her Master of Health Administration from Louisiana State University in Shreveport, La.

Basiga's roots are unassuming. She was one of two children raised by her single mother with support by her paternal grandparents and other relatives. She migrated to the U.S. in 2010 and joined the Navy with her husband, Rendal. Basiga started as a dental technician and her gradual procession provided learning opportunities and minor leadership roles.

"Since I joined, I've had my share of ups and downs, celebrations, and frustrations. We are blessed with two children, Ewan (9 years old) and Mia (5 years old). My mother, Sol, has also been with us ever since our first year in the Navy," shared Basiga who has been stationed at Naval Medical Center San Diego, with 1st Dental Battalion, Camp Pendleton and 3rd Dental Battalion Okinawa, Japan before her current duty assignment which will see her relinquish being Public Health Directorate leading petty officer as she moves on into a new role after working in Puget Sound Naval Shipyard at the largest occupational health program in the entire Department of Defense, serving [approximately]16,500 civilian shipyard workers.

Basiga attests that applying for the Medical Service Corps In-Service Procurement Program seemed like an ideal commitment for herself, her family and also for the Navy.

"I desired a rewarding career and a long-term profession that could also translate well in the civilian sector. I wanted to be a part of the professional ranks supporting Navy Medicine from behind the scenes. By working with and observing stellar MSC officers, I always told myself I would be like them someday. MSCs inspired me to start my graduate education and follow the route to become a healthcare administrator," Basiga said.

A healthcare administration is but one of many undergraduate and graduate training opportunities offered in a variety of MSC specialties leading to a MSC commission. Other specialties are physician assistant, environmental health, entomology, radiation health, industrial hygiene, pharmacy, occupational therapy, and social work.

"I want to pursue the plans, operations and medical intelligence route to gain more operational experience and go

to exciting billets," continued Basiga. "I know I have a lot to learn, which will take years. I am willing to try the different jobs in the health care administrator realm and build on my future experiences to become a well-rounded MSC officer."

The entire application and selection process did have its challenging moments and required thoughtful deliberation.

"Attention to detail. Making my package look neat, being meticulous to uniformity, using correct grammar, and having it checked and critiqued by leaders and mentors took a lot of work. I had to rewrite my personal statement a hundred times until I was completely satisfied. I had to be my own worst critic. Honestly, I was not even 100 percent confident. When the results were posted, I was in complete disbelief," exclaimed Basiga.

When she found out she was selected, she immediately told Rendal.

"I shared first with my husband. This achievement is a milestone for our military careers and family. Behind the scenes, he did all the hard work with me, if not more," said Basiga. "I then called Lt. j.g. Pinzas and Capt. Edusada, the real rockstars behind this entire application process. Then, I had to call/text/email the rest of the people who helped me with my application. My DPH/PSNS leadership for reviewing my package and preparing me for my interviews, my appraisers, those who wrote my letter of recommendations, and those who reviewed my package, and those who provided their input."

Basiga lingered long after work contacting all her present and past mentors, leaders, friends, junior Sailors, and everyone who's impacted her life.

"Some got to me first before I even got to them because the results were posted," related Basiga. "My phone was pretty much blowing up in between. Capt. Patrick Fitzpatrick, NMRTC Bremerton commanding officer, personally called to congratulate me. Wow!"

Basiga readily admits that becoming a MSC officer is the result of a group effort, from the mentorship to guidance to training to even moral support.

"Overall, this achievement is genuinely an all-hands effort. My heart was just so full of gratitude and appreciation, especially to all the great leaders I've known and worked with. I am humbled that my hard work paid off. I would not be here today if not for the people who took their time to raise me in the Navy," stated Basiga, noting that the entire process did provide her with valuable lesson learned.

I have learned so much that I don't know if I can itemize them. Most importantly, I learned the value of networking and seeking mentorship. It is a very humbling learning experience. This would not be possible without the people who took their time mentoring and guiding me throughout my career. Also, I learned that this is not a one-and-done thing but a continuous learning process," Basiga said.

Now that she has been through the entire process and been selected to become a MSC officer, Basiga has advice for others considering a same or similar path of achievement.

"My advice is to get to know yourself. Be clear on your goals. Put your mind to it and get to work. I regret I waited until my eighth year in the Navy to make up my mind and finally start with my masters," shared Basiga. "Learn how to find, read, and interpret instructions, research, ask questions, and seek mentorship. Utilize many military resources like tuition assistance and dare to start something great for yourself. We often find ourselves so overwhelmed with the things happening around us that we forget to take care of our personal and professional growth." For Basiga, serving in Navy Medicine is not just professional, but also personal.

"This organization saved my family when my son acquired a rare and fatal disease and when my daughter developed a chronic condition at such a young age that made her life miserable," candidly shared Basiga. "For this reason, I support this organization's trajectory. I am invested in the readiness of the warfighter, but most importantly, in their families, wherever they are in the world."

When asked to sum up her experience with Navy Medicine in one sentence, Basiga replied, "It is very rewarding to be a part of Navy Medicine, in any given day, I am very proud to be a part of this team!"

I Am Navy Medicine – HM1 Paulo C. Guillen and MSC In-Service Procurement Program appointee

By Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer -- Rare is the time when the normal staid and studious ambiance of the lab in Navy Medicine Readiness Training Unit Bangor become full of boisterous gaiety.

The sudden burst of unleashed enthusiasm was the result of the Navy Medical Service Corps officially increasing their ranks as Navy Medicine's most diverse corps.

Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Paulo C. Guillen, leading petty officer of NMRTU Bangor Ancillary Services is slated to officially become a MSC officer after being recently selected for the MSC In-Service Procurement Program.

"The lab staff heard me scream and laugh! After that, I called my family to share the news," shared Guillen after being told he was chosen. "What's gratifying is being able to show my fellow Sailors what hard work and discipline can accomplish."

The MSC In-Service Procurement Program provides a pathway to an officer commission for career motivated active duty enlisted personnel like Guillen, in pay grades E-5 through E-9, who meet the eligibility criteria defined.

Guillen's commission specialty focus will be in healthcare administration, part of the wide range of undergraduate and graduate training opportunities offered in a variety of MSC specialties leading to a MSC commission.

Opportunities are also available in such specialties as physician assistant, environmental health, entomology, radiation health, industrial hygiene, pharmacy, occupational therapy, and social work. Duty under Instruction permits members to attend fully funded training to complete a qualifying degree with no break in service.
For Guillen, originally from Barranquilla, Colombia, the MSC specialty training leading to a commission is part of his U.S. Navy career path forged well before he enlisted in Norwalk, California after immigrating to the U.S. in 2006.

"I decided to join the Navy because I wanted to give back to the country that welcomed me with open arms," said Guillen, who attended Colombia Naval Officer Academy from 1999 to 2002 for his Bachelor of Sciences in Naval Sciences before graduate school at the University of North Carolina Wilmington in 2020 for a Master of Business Administration with concentration in healthcare administration.

That gravitational pull of helping to care for those in need has led Guillen to be part of Navy Medicine since 2011. His initial assignment as a hospital corpsman with nuclear medicine technologist specialty training was at Naval Health Center Portsmouth, followed by duty at Naval Medical Center Camp Lejeune before transferring to Navy Medicine Readiness Training Command Bremerton November 2022.

"Health is the one thing that you cannot put a price on. Healthy Sailors translate to mission success. I want to be able to help from my position as much as possible," remarked Guillen.

"The MSC community is the backbone of Navy Medicine and always working to make sure we have the tools to succeed," Guillen continued. "I want to be able to positively influence as many Sailors as possible and to keep them healthy in a physical and mental way."

Guillen admitted the application process proved to be a challenge. "It takes a lot of preparation, time management, and patience," he said, adding that one valuable lesson he learned along the administrative way was the power of deliberately seeking out advice.

"Ask many questions," flatly stated Guillen. "Don't be afraid to say I don't know and look for guidance. For others following, don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone. You need to grow to succeed. You won't be able to do that if you become stagnant."

Guillen adheres to the concept of service before self, not only insisting the best part of his career is when he's able to help his fellow Sailors advance as well as stay focused on keeping warfighters and their family members ready, healthy and on the job.

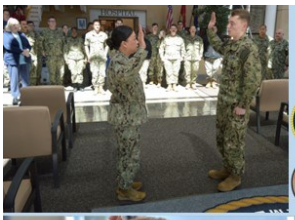
"Sometimes we get too focused on what is happening right at the moment and forget to look at the bigger picture," said Guillen. "Being here means that we are providing the opportunity to thousands of Sailors to do their job, and that is a great feeling."

Although his actual date for his commissioning as an MSC officer is still pending, Guillen is well on his way to becoming part of one of the three the basic communities which make up MSC: Health Care Administration field which Guillen will join consists of such disciplines as education and training management, financial management, Fleet Marine Force, general health care administration, health care facilities planning, information management, manpower systems analysis, medical logistics management, operations research, patient administration, and plans, operations and medical intelligence.

The Clinical Care specialties of MSC include audiology, clinical psychology, dietetics/food management, occupational therapy, optometry, pharmacy, physical therapy, physician assistant, podiatry, and social work.
MSC Health Care Science field encompasses aerospace experimental psychology, aerospace physiology, biochemistry, entomology, environmental health, industrial hygiene, medical technology, microbiology, physiology, radiation health, and research psychology.

Guillen will remain on active duty, receive full pay and allowance at his current enlisted pay grade. He can even take the advancement exam to advance in rank while in the program. Once he become a U.S. Navy commissioned officer, it is a permanent appointment requiring at least ten years to be eligible to retire as an officer.

When asked to sum up his experience with Navy Medicine, Guillen replied, "It's been a crazy ride and I cannot wait to see what's next!"



From gold to silver at NMRTC Bremerton

When U.S. Navy Ensign David Tegtmeyer openly expressed that his promotion would happen sooner than later with his department head at Navy Medicine Readiness Training Command Bremerton, the initial assessment was his promotion, certainly highly deserving, would take place in another month or so.

There was a slight "let's wait and see" reaction to the Medical Service Corps officer's assertion.

No more.

Tegtmeyer, from Las Vegas, Nevada, and assistant department head for NMRTC Bremerton Information Management department, was officially promoted to the next highest rank, lieutenant junior grade, by Capt. Maria Edusada, NMRTC Bremerton Director for Administration, May 9, 2024.

"That ensign gold bar was probably getting a little heavy by now. Time for a silver upgrade," quipped Edusada.

Tegtmeyer helps guide vital network and computer-based support for a program consistently ranked in the upper quadrant of all Defense Health Agency medical treatment facilities. He has also been instrumental in preparing the command for updated hardware and software technology (official Navy photos by Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer).

U.S. Navy Medical Service Corps officer Randy Le was out of uniform for a short time Jan. 18, 2024.

Capt. Maria Edusada, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton Director for Administration formally promoted Le to Navy lieutenant in front of command MSC officers, his Nutrition Management department and staff members.

Le, a registered dietitian, has led Nutrition Management over the last year to such notable highlights such as the Combined Food Operations staff recognized by Department of Defense's Consortium for Health and Military Performance for their ongoing work regarding military nutrition and the Schon Hall Bachelor Enlisted Quarters team receiving a 100 percent satisfaction from tenants.

Making Feats for the Feet with Naval Hospital Bremerton's Podiatrist

By Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer -- When it comes to healing heels, such feats for the feet are the specialty of Naval Hospital Bremerton's foot doctor.

Lt. Edee Renier, staff podiatrist assigned to NHB's Orthopedic department, is helping Navy and Marine Corps personnel keep operational ready and able to stand on their own two feet.

"Foot care is critical," said Renier, citing that the anatomy of everyone's feet is as intricate as are the foot issues and injuries which many people experience.

"Each foot has 28 bones, 33 joints, 29 muscles and over 30 ligaments," explained Renier. "The military is a high demand workplace. Your feet carry you everywhere your orders demand. When your feet are hurting it limits your ability to serve to the fullest capacity. If every step hurts you, you can't take a step forward. If you feel like you can't trust your ankle to carry you, how can others trust you to carry your team forward?"

The list is long with such conditions as ankle sprains and strains, stress fractures, plantar fasciitis, shin splints, blisters, bunions, corns, calluses and ingrown toenails. Wear and tear can also cause arthritis and tendonitis.

Taking a step back through history offers numerous footnotes of the travails experienced by American servicemembers.

George Washington's Continental Army at Valley Forge from 1777 to 1778 was forced to deal with severe

cold which led to many afflicted with frostbite and resulted in lost toes.

Foot immersion condition(s) were also prevalent. Soldiers during World War I, World War II and Korean War had to deal with trench foot, the result of longstanding exposure to damp conditions.

In the Vietnam War it was jungle rot, similar to trench foot, with feet getting damaged by continual damp conditions, as well as a tendency to also get infected.

Compiled data from Operation Enduring Freedom - 2001 to 2021 in Afghanistan - shows foot and ankle injuries accounted for almost a quarter of those wounded.

Even Pulitzer Prize recipient Bill Mauldin, when assigned to the 45th Infantry Division slogging their way in Europe during WWII made wry note of common foot-related occurrences in his award winning cartoons featuring GIs Joe and Willie.

In one sketch, Willie expresses his gratitude to Joe for saving his life, "Yesterday ya saved my life. I'd swore I'd pay ya back. Here's my last pair of dry socks."

Another scene featured Willie having his feet examined by an Army medic, who confides that although he's "jest a country doc," he does consult with Private First Class Johnson, "The big blister specialist."

For those stationed aboard a Navy ship or submarine in an environment of non-forgiving surfaces – including knee knockers and ladder wells – as well as tight quarters bringing personal hygiene to the fore, foot placement while haze-gray underway could at times be a concern.

Laughter alone might not be the best medicine.

"In the active duty population, I see a lot of patients who have sprained their ankle and never fully recovered. It's common for me to find torn ligaments, tendons and even damaged cartilage in these patients. This can be serious and, in some cases, lead to chronic pain and arthritis at the ankle joint. Plantar fasciitis is also a serious problem in any foot and ankle clinic, and if left untreated or undertreated, it can have a serious negative effect on my patient's lives, said Renier, adding that foot injury awareness is gradually becoming more commonplace.

"The military has some very strong, brave, and pain tolerant individuals that often try to push through the pain to continue serving," Renier continued. "Trying to treat these high level athletes can be difficult because they have so much mind-over-matter training engrained into their lifestyles."

There are several priorities which Renier advocates for personal foot care.

"[The] top priority for foot care amongst our active-duty service members is preventing infections by keeping your feet clean and dry in your boots, especially in Washington where it's constantly raining and hard to keep your socks dry," said Renier.

“Taking the necessary time to recover from an injury can also be very difficult for individuals who don’t want to let their teams down,” remarked Renier. “But returning to activity before you are ready can prevent a full recovery and leave you permanently injured. I’m here to provide helpful tips and hints on prevention of foot and ankle injuries. When they do end up occurring, I am able to help maximize your recovery potential.”

For those who might be unsure or uncertain when an appointment should be made to see a podiatrist, Renier has a prompt answer.

“When your feet hurt! If you had an injury, you never fully recovered, or if something on your feet just doesn’t feel the way it used to, I’m happy to take a look! I’m always happy to see acute injuries as well, like ankle sprains, broken toes etc.,” exclaimed Renier.

Being centered in Puget Sound with the Navy’s third largest fleet concentration allows Renier to share her expertise in caring for foot and ankle specific medical conditions. Appointments are made via referral from primary care managers and providers of patients. Consults can also come from such clinics as Urgent Care and Physical Therapy. Depending on the diagnosis, her treatment for those in need could be anything from prescription ankle braces and custom made orthotics to surgical repair or steroid injections.

“Navy Medicine is a mission focused team-based effort. Protecting our warfighters and their families has always been a top priority for me. The unique approach that military healthcare takes is something rare and highly undervalued in modern medicine. NHB has a strong commitment to patient’s wellbeing and a patient centered approach to national defense,” stated Renier, a Santa Cruz, California native and Scotts Valley High School grad.

She completed undergraduate education requirements at Iowa State University and developed an affinity for her Midwest surroundings.

“I loved my time in Iowa and ended up staying to complete my doctorate in Podiatric Medicine and Surgery at Des Moines University College of Podiatric Medicine and Surgery, graduating in 2016,” related Renier.

During her third year of medical school, Renier began to reconsider her future after becoming a doctor.

“Is this really all I could be? I always felt like I missed a step in developing myself as a leader and an American. Somewhere in the whirlwind of higher education I had missed out on the opportunity to serve my country. I contacted several military branches. The Navy career path was the clearest fit for the skills I had to offer,” Renier said.

With no Navy podiatry residencies, Renier completed a civilian residency in Seattle specializing in rearfoot trauma and reconstruction. She was then commissioned into the Navy following completion of her residency.

“It’s been a massive learning curve becoming acquainted with Navy tradition and protocol. Now that my podiatry practice at NHB is in full swing. Life has become wonderfully busy. I’m happy to fill my schedule with patients I can help,” said Renier.

Renier attests that the best part of her career has been the positive follow-through when helping patients.

“One of the most rewarding parts of podiatry is seeing your patients recover from the pain they had and walk confidently again,” Renier said.

When asked to sum up her experience with Navy Medicine in one sentence, Renier replied, “I’m proud to be here starting off on the right foot!”

From a Small Twig comes 75 years of Medical Readiness

SUBJ: 2022 NAVY MEDICAL SERVICE CORPS 75TH BIRTHDAY MESSAGE//
1. To my Medical Service Corps (MSC) colleagues, today marks your 75th year as a staff corps in the United States Navy – your Diamond Anniversary as a Corps! Diamonds are the strongest substances on Earth, as well as one of the most desired, and your Corps' passion and strength continues to shine as you take care of our Sailors and Marines, enabling warfighters to execute their missions.
2. From the beginning of the Cold War through Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic and beyond, the women and men of Navy Medicine's most diverse corps have served with honor, distinction, and devotion. With the stroke of a pen, the MSC was born on August 4th, 1947 when President Harry S. Truman signed the Army-Navy MSC Act into law. The legislation ensured that the hospital corps officers and volunteer specialists serving temporary roles in World War II had a permanent place in Military Medicine.
3. As I reflect on the 251 MSC plank-owners, I am captivated by the unique history and experiences of these pioneers – all were World War II veterans. More than 70 percent were Mustangs, having served as Hospital Corpsmen at one point or another in their careers. And at 60 years old, CDR Glenn Lyon was the eldest plank-owner. He originally enlisted in the Navy as a Hospital Corpsman in 1909 and forty years later, became the first MSC to serve in command leading the Naval School of Hospital Administration (the forerunner of today's Naval Medical Leader and Professional Development Command). Looking back, I see a bright string of diamonds – represented by each of you and connecting the past with our present – and the future of the MSC is bright!
4. To the more than 3,000 Active and Reserve MSC Officers representing 31 subspecialties – thank you for your dedication, service, and commitment to excellence. Happy Birthday Shipmates!
5. Released by Rear Admiral Bruce L. Gillingham, Chief, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery.//
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NAVY MEDICINE READINESS AND TRAINING COMMAND

By Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer -- For 75 years, the Navy Medical Service Corps has long been regarded as the most diverse corps, comprised of health care administrators, clinicians and scientists.

These medical professionals are trained and focused as a ready medical force for the Navy surgeon general priority of ensuring the warfighter's medical readiness. Nowhere is that more applicable than in the nation's third largest fleet concentration.

Navy Medicine Readiness Training Command Bremerton held a MSC Birthday cake-cutting ceremony August 4, 2022 to commemorate their years of service before self since their inception in 1947.

The MSC plank owners from that uncertain and tumultuous time just two years after the end of the Second World War were all WWII veterans, many of them prior hospital corpsmen. Their corps adopted as their insignia an unassuming emblem to signify the support they continue to provide to all of Navy Medicine, from an idea actually proposed a few years earlier.

"The recommendation suggested that our corps device, "shall consist of a modification of the oak leaf and acorn of the Medical Corps. The modification shall be a small gold bar, attached to the base of the oak leaf, centered and at right angles to the stem." This symbolic branch represented the support provided to Navy Medicine. So, although we may call it a twig, the gold bar on our oak leaves depicts the combined efforts to bolster and enhance medical services within our Navy, Never has such a small twig supported so many responsibilities," explained Cmdr. Jared Taylor, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton director of branch health clinics and MSC birthday coordinator.

There are approximately 40 MSC officers assigned to NMRTC Bremerton, providing expertise in 31 specialties which comprise three basic branches to handle all those many responsibilities throughout the many Navy Medicine hospitals and clinics across the seven seas.

The Clinical Care specialties include audiology, clinical psychology, dietetics/food management, occupational therapy, optometry, pharmacy, physical therapy, physician assistant, podiatry, and social work.

The Health Care Science field encompasses aerospace experimental psychology, aerospace physiology, bio-

chemistry, entomology, environmental health, industrial hygiene, medical technology, microbiology, physiology, radiation health, and research psychology.

Health Care Administration consists of education and training management, financial management, fleet marine force, general health care administration, health care facilities planning, information management, manpower systems analysis, medical logistics management, operations research, patient administration, and plans, operations and medical intelligence.

“It’s phenomenal what our MSC does. From those initial 251 to over 3,000 Navy wide, located all over the globe, are absolutely critical to our mission wherever we go and whatever we do. I’m very happy and proud to serve with you,” stated Capt. Patrick Fitzpatrick NHB director and NMRTC Bremerton commanding officer.

Well-wishes were shared from Rear Adm. Bruce Gillingham, Navy surgeon general and chief, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery and Rear Adm. Matt Case, MSC director.

“To my MSC colleagues, today marks your 75th year as a staff corps in the United State Navy, your diamond anniversary as a corps. Diamonds are the strongest substance on earth, as well as one of the most desired. Your corps’ passion and strength continues to shine as you take care of our Sailors and Marines, enabling warfighters to execute their missions,” wrote Gillingham.

“As we observe our diamond jubilee, remember our history and heritage are infinitely important in who we are, what we do, and the legacy we continue to build. As we commemorate this momentous occasion, I am filled with excitement thinking about what our past accomplishments mean for our future capabilities and success,” Case shared.

As is the custom in a Navy Medicine birthday celebration with one of the various corps, the most experienced member, Cmdr. Maria Edusada, MSC healthcare administrator and director for administration was joined by the youngest, Lt. j.g. Logan Leon, MSC physician assistant assigned to Navy Medicine Readiness Training Unit Bangor, to formally cut the cake.

I Am Navy Medicine – from Hospital Corps to Medical Service Corps – Ensign Emert

By Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer -- When Michaela Nicole Emert recently arrived one morning at Navy Medicine Readiness Training Unit Everett, she was a hospital corpsman second class petty officer.

She departed that same day as a commissioned officer in the Navy’s Medical Service Corps.

For Emert, becoming a laboratory officer not only advances her chosen career specialty on an upward path, it also continues a legacy of military service in her family.

“My father was in the Army as a combat medic and my grandfather was in the Navy as a Seabee. With the desire to meld the two worlds, I signed up for the Navy as a hospital corpsman,” said Emert, from Ogden, Utah, and a 2012 graduate from Admiral Arthur W. Radford High School, Honolulu, Hawaii.

She also began her Navy career in 2012. “I knew from the start I wanted to be a hospital corpsman and wouldn’t settle for anything else,” added Emert.

“I grew up living a nomadic life style, moving around the Midwest,” continued Emert. “I loved it as a child. When my father joined the Army, we ended up moving to Hawaii. My mother told me when I enlisted that I would tell people around me I was always join the military. Every generation of my family has had someone in the military. I wanted to be no different.”

That dedication lead her to being assigned as an advanced medical laboratory technician and the assistant lead petty officer of NMRTU Everett's Primary Care department.

It was in the laboratory environment – critical in helping to identify cancers, diseases and afflictions through testing - where she found herself engrossed. Her interest originated at Navy Medicine Readiness Training Command San Diego and has further blossomed at her current duty station.

"Two different commands, but ones that allowed me to see different sides of both the Navy and being a laboratory technician. When I got selected for advanced laboratory technician, I was surprised but grew to love the profession and all it holds. So much so that after a few years in San Diego, I decided that I wanted to be a laboratory officer," explained Emert.

Emert attests that the mentoring, teaching and guidance she received as a young Sailor helped influence her goals, enhance her knowledge and attain not one, but two, bachelor degrees. She graduated from Thomas Edison State University in 2017 with her Bachelor of Science degree followed by achieving her Bachelor of Arts degree in 2021.

"I had wonderful naval officers that grew my interest in both the Navy and laboratory world. With the determination in mind, I pursued my degree while on night shift. When I made it to NMRTU Everett, I pursued my certification and applied for Medical Service Corps – In Service Procurement Program. My first attempt was unsuccessful. Undeterred I applied for the Direct Accession program through the Navy Recruiting Command. I was informed I had been professionally recommended by the board for advanced laboratory officer," Emert said.

The submission process for any Navy advancement program places demands on any aspiring applicant. There's a host of bureaucratic red-tape, which includes assessment, investigative and administrative needs. All of that on top of the normal work flow at NMRTU Everett which saw the Lab provide over 16,000 tests last year, handle a daily average of over 60 patients, and play a pivotal role in helping to stop the spread of COVID-19.

"The most challenging aspect for me has been staying positive during the ups and downs of the whole process. From putting together the MSC packages to waiting for results and realizing that one day your will go from enlisted to officer with a blink can be a lot to handle, even when prepared," stated Emert.

Along with the tribulations were encouragements.

"The most gratifying aspect has been to show Sailors around me that if you put in the work and have a solid plan for your future, that plan can be executed," noted Emert. "Yes, hiccups do come around. But it's worth taking a deep breath and seeing what the next step is to reevaluate and push forth."

Her maturation process has been both personal and professional. The lessons realized are there for those who are willing.

"I have learned to seek the advice of those around you. Putting together the packages, I spoke to more personnel than I normally would have. I sought the advice of Nurse Corps officers, an environmental health officer, physician assistants, physical therapists, independent duty corpsmen, and so many others," shared Emert, advocating that others can – and should – make their career goals happen.

"My best advice is twofold. Know what you want and realize that there is usually more than one way to your end point, and never be afraid to ask or push for what you want because the worst thing you can do is tell yourself, "no," before anyone else can," Emert said.

The best part of Emert's career has centered on taking her academic achievements and sharing with others.

"While in NMRTU Everett, not only was I able to obtain my Medical Laboratory Scientist certification but I also began instructing both civilians and active duty personnel on phlebotomy and laboratory procedures. Watching these personnel grow over the time they were in the lab was amazing and something I want to continue pursuing in my career," said Emert.

When asked to sum up her experience in Navy Medicine with one sentence, Emert replied, "Everyone has the potential to grow and learn."

The Ayes have it for this Navy Medicine Eye Care Expert

By Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer -- Seeing is believing.

When the Armed Forces Optometric Society (AFOS) was accepting nominees for annual awards, there was no shortsighted hesitation from Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command Bremerton.

Lt. Courtney C. Rafferty, assigned to Navy Medicine and Training Unit (NMRTU) Everett, proved to be an eye-opening candidate and was selected as the Navy Junior Optometrist of the Year.

“The recognition is incredibly important to our small Optometry Clinic because my goal is to improve the environment I’m in, regardless of where it is when I arrive,” said Rafferty, Primary Care Department head. “When I leave here, what changes did I make that will go on to make life better for future patients and our staff members? Typically our tours are only about three years, which isn’t a very long time. It can be hard to try and implement long-lasting change. That is my focus.”

The AFOS Awards Board criteria – leadership roles, major accomplishments, initiatives - provided a vision of the overlapping qualifications which Rafferty brought to her multiple duties at the clinic.

According to Cmdr. Matthew Behil, NMRTC Bremerton deputy director of Medical Services, Rafferty professionalism as the sole optometrist was an eye-full for the fleet. She supported seven departments at NMRTU Everett delivering health-care to over 5,400 beneficiaries, including six Navy destroyers, 23 tenant commands on Naval Station Everett and two U.S. Coast Guard cutters.

“She invested countless hours in improving the Optometry Clinic. She improved access to care by 51.4 percent, reduced wait times from approximately 34 to 16 calendar days for active duty service members and increased appointment availability by 11 percent. She also significantly reduced Optometry patient wait time within the clinic by 87 percent, from an average of 35 to 5 minutes, saving 994 patient hours per year. Her work ensured all patients are now receiving care within the TRICARE standard of less than 28 calendar days for Optometry appointments,” explained Behil.

Rafferty affirms that any far-sighted progress accomplished to make the Optometry Clinic better was a result of team work and not just her individual efforts.

“I’m incredibly proud of my corpsman, Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Veronica Vargas,” Rafferty said. “I wanted to empower her to make changes. Over the past year she continues to come up with new suggestions and recommendations to improve our space. I am so grateful to work with her. When she is working way harder than required, people see her efforts. She has made a positive impact on our Optometry clinic.”

For the Mishawaka, Ind. 2009 high school alumnus and 2017 graduate of Optometry school at New England College of Optometry, Boston, Mass., the ongoing effort to help stop the spread of COVID-19 has led her to adapt flexible, eye-care methods for optometry services during the pandemic outbreak.

“Optometry unfortunately is not a very mask-friendly field as the majority of glasses-wearers could likely attest to. There is quite a bit of lens fogging that makes the exam a bit more exasperating for the patient and the doctor,” commented Rafferty. “However, I am proud of my corpsmen for identifying solutions to show our patients we are going above and beyond to keep them safe. We have been sanitizing every single pair of glasses that patients try on which involves additional time and work. But our team has been really efficient. We have worked hard to minimize the time patients spend in office due to concerns about being physically present inside a medical clinic.”

Adhering to the Navy surgeon general's priority of operational readiness by ensuring that there's a medically ready force as well as a ready medical force, Rafferty coordinated with the command's Ophthalmology Clinic to expedite the refractive surgery process and decrease patient consult wait time by nearly 50 percent. She also enhanced joint operations with Army leadership to timely update vision readiness for all Army personnel who receive eye care at her clinic. All of which stood out to the AFOS Awards Board.

Still, others need convincing that an eye-exam is not an inconvenience slight of their sight.

"The most challenging part is getting buy in about the importance of eye care in the military. I was an ophthalmic technician before I attended Optometry school and assumed optometrists basically just fitted glasses and contacts. Why do people need to have frequent eye exams if their vision is fine? I learned that there are so many systemic diseases that optometrists can be the first to detect," stated Rafferty, noting that eye exams are done without any scalpels or needles, just lights and lenses.

"Our clinic performs imaging on every patient and helps engage patients when they are able to see the inside of their eye, get excited seeing their retinal photos and ask questions about what pathology we can detect with routine eye exams," continued Rafferty. "Unfortunately, I have had patients who make it up to twenty years in the military without much more than a simple vision screening. My goal is for patients to leave with a better familiarity of their ocular anatomy and why routine eye care is still important even for those with 20/20 vision."

Rafferty's Navy career began on an epicurean – not eyesight – whim.

"In college, my friend and I attended nearly every single event that provided food. We were always hungry and living on a budget. I heard about an opportunity to learn more about Navy Medicine. I remember the pasta. But more importantly I still recall the recruiter was so incredibly professional and articulate, I wanted to be just like her. I was interested in public service and was initially leaning towards working with the Indian Health Service, until I found out more about Navy Medicine. The chance to travel while serving was an ideal career choice," related Rafferty.

And travel Rafferty has done. As part of the humanitarian and civic assistance mission Pacific Partnership 2018 aboard USNS Mercy (T-AH 19), she journeyed to Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Vietnam, Japan, Hawaii, and Guam. Her work during the deployment contributed to the AFOS Awards Board criteria of 'service to the visual welfare of the public.'

"One of my favorite moments was having the chance to participate in community health engagements during Pacific Partnership. We were able to fit children with their first pair of glasses that their families knew they needed but couldn't afford. I didn't get my first pair of glasses until nearly high school and it completely changed my experience. My teachers assumed I was not engaged and not a strong student until we realized I couldn't see the board. My first pair of glasses changed my life. I'm very lucky to get to pay that forward as an optometrist now," shared Rafferty, who served as community health engagement lead for 16 missions and delivered eye care to more than 2,000 patients.

The final criteria for award consideration was providing 'service to AFOS and professional organizations.'

Although the current pandemic has led to many plans being postponed or simply cancelled altogether, Rafferty still presented a virtual – and visual – presentation on optic neuritis to the American Academy of Optometry of over 100 attendees.

When asked to describe the best part of her career, Rafferty readily acknowledged allegiance to those she works with and provides for.

"I am so grateful to have patients who have shared their stories with me. The military has some of the most resilient individuals with incredibly diverse backgrounds. I have met so many patients who have surprised and impressed me with their experiences and positive attitudes in spite of countless hardships," said Rafferty. "In the Navy I have been exposed to awesome mentors who motivate me and have gone out of their way to try and set me up for success. Thank you to Cmdr. Christopher Abbott, Cmdr. Matthew Behil, Lt. Cmdr. Scott Williams, Lt. Kevin Hoang, as well as my husband who reminds me to take breaks when I start bringing too much work home."

Pharmacists Indispensable in Dispensing Patient-Centered Care

By Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer -- They're behind the scenes, but not behind the times.

National Pharmacist Day, January 12, 2023, provides an annual date to recognize that the pharmacists assigned to Naval Hospital Bremerton are at the forefront in combining high tech convenience with patient-centered care. Those days of an apothecary using an abacus to prepare and dispense medicine are long gone. NHB pharmacists - such as Lt. Cmdr. Evan Romrell, Lt. Cmdr. Jason Galka, and Isabella "Bella" Wolak – are a crucial link in providing health care support to those in need.

They are intricately involved in offering advice about prescription dosage, usage and efficacy. They collaborate and counsel with physicians, nurses and health care teams as well as patients on the proper and safe use of medications. From text messaging to the Q-Anywhere option to ScriptCenter pickup centers, all NHB Pharmacy upgrades are designed to provide safe, secure and timely prescriptions for all eligible beneficiaries.

Yet none of the improvements take place without the pharmacists making it happen. Which is no small task due to the sheer amount of medications provided on a daily basis.

"Our volume is the same [approximately 330,000 outpatient prescriptions filled in 2021] but staffing is a challenge. We're down several pharmacists and six or seven pharmacy technicians. But our staff are amazing," said Romrell, who deflected attention from themselves to attention on what they provide NHB's patients.

“We’ve streamlined with a few innovations to limit waiting in the lobby and the changes we’ve made benefit our staff and our patients,” Romrell said.

To sign up for the text messaging service, patients can simply add their phone number when they check in at one of the Outpatient Pharmacy’s kiosks.

“Additionally, pharmacy staff can update their profile at the window,” said Romrell.

According to Romrell, signing up for texts allows patients to get the latest information about their prescriptions, such as ready notifications or messages about a delay due to a medication being out of stock.

“Or if they use Q-anywhere, their phone number is automatically saved. By using the Q-Anywhere feature it allows them to pre-activate their prescriptions from ‘anywhere.’ Then they can just come to pick them up when they are ready, greatly reducing the time spent waiting in the pharmacy,” Romrell said, urging those who want to skip the pharmacy wait, to sign up for their Q-anywhere Phast Pass Prescription Service: https://bremerton.tricare.mil/Portals/111/NH%20Bremerton%20Pharmacy%20QR%20Code%20Phast%20Pass.pdf

The ScriptCenter is a self-serve dispensing service available for all customers who need after hours services. Or just choose not to wait in the lobby. The ScriptCenter is easy to use. The process starts when ordering prescriptions through AudioCare at 360-475-4217, then select the ScriptCenter kiosk option at several pickup location.

When requesting for the first time, registration is required so a patient needs to bring the 12-digit prescription number (starting with 000) found on the medication bottle. For those who don’t have a prescription number, it is still possible to establish a username and PIN to access the ScriptCenter. Pharmacy staff can help complete the registration when the prescription is filled.

Romrell also hinted that there’s more advances pending, all designed to make it easier for their patients to pick up their prescriptions.

“If anyone has any problem, let us know and we’ll help work through it,” stated Romrell.

Even on National Pharmacy Day.

I Am Navy Medicine, Lt. Travis J. Silvey, MSC Health Care Administrator

By Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer -- It was no mere happenstance that Rear Adm. Guido F. Valdes, Naval Medical Forces Pacific commander, San Diego Military Health Systems market director and Navy Medical Corps chief stopped into Navy Medicine Readiness Training Command Bremerton Human Resources Department during his initial familiarization visit, Sept. 7, 2022.

Because there was a behind-the-scenes but not behind-the-times Navy Medical Service Corps officer to acknowledge.

Lt. Travis J. Silvey was recognized for his continuous effort over the past year in juggling multiple responsibilities for NMRTC Bremerton's Directorate of Administration.

"I was genuinely surprised and appreciated the recognition. All credit goes to my hard working staff and my leaders who supported me," said Silvey.

The Kansas City, Missouri native and current department head of Human Resources has also held a number of other duties such as manpower analyst, Operational Security officer, DoD Performance Management Appraisal Program, and Physicians and Dentists Pay Plan coordinator.

After graduating from Park Hill High School in 2003, Silvey began his Navy career in 2005 as a hospital corpsman. He got his Associates in Arts at Florida State College in 2014, followed by his Bachelor of Science, Health Care Management at Southern Illinois University in 2017.

He was commissioned in 2018 through the Navy's Medical Service Corps in-service procurement program, which allows active duty Sailors the opportunity to become commissioned as an officer in the medical field.

One of the chosen fields of expertise in the program is health care administration, where Silvey as excelled. He added his Master of Health Administration and Policy at Uniformed Services University in 2020.

“I joined the military to pay for college. I chose the Navy because my grandfather was a Navy veteran who influenced me when I was younger. In the early 2000s, the medical field was growing rapidly. I saw an opportunity to grow in a field where I could enjoy job satisfaction by helping others,” related Silvey, who has served at Naval Hospitals Jacksonville, Portsmouth and Walter Reed National Military Medical Center before his current duty station in the Pacific Northwest helping coordinate medical care to the nation’s third largest fleet concentration.

All his previous assignments have helped prepare him for his present responsibilities.

When he was the leading petty officer from 2007 to 2014 for Naval Hospital Jacksonville Urology Department, he managed 16 staff members in treating approximately 3,200 patients annually.

At Walter Reed National Military Medical Center from 2014 to 2018, he worked in Directorate of Surgery, Directorate for Resource Management and as the executive assistant to the command senior enlisted leader, managing over 40 personnel in ensuring patient-centered care to approximately 40,000 beneficiaries on an annual basis, along with providing executive administrative support in processing over 800 correspondences.

Those are just a few samples to illustrate Silvey’s current commitment in overseeing the day-to-day overlapping administrative needs of a military treatment facility.

His command has added the DoD’s new electronic health record MHS GENESIS in 2017, played a major role in helping stop the spread of COVID-19 for over two years and has recently completed the transition of management and administration – as well as personnel, property and systems - from Naval Hospital Bremerton to the Defense Health Agency.

“I identified and transferred over 300 staff members from Department of the Navy to Department of Defense during the Military Treatment Facility Realignment of Personnel, Property and Systems,” Silvey said, affirming that it was challenging to juggle and coordinate not only active duty assignment but assist leadership in determining the multiple needs and requirements for the civil service staff.

“Frequently briefing and maintaining transparency of actions during a period of significant increased workload is challenging. I have been fortunate to have very supportive leadership,” said Silvey, noting that it’s been gratifying that his leadership has confidence in the tools provided they need during this transition.

The best part about Silvey’s career has been having access to great mentors and true professionals. Top lessons learned include, “trust but verify,” “data quality is paramount” and “serving my small part of Navy Medicine provides a disproportionate amount of job satisfaction.”

When asked to sum up his experience here with Navy Medicine in one sentence, Silvey replied, “Being flexible and hardworking with a smile paid off.”

Haze Gray Dietitian Underway

By Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer -- It’s only fitting for a Navy registered dietitian to help determine if the old adage, ‘a brace of sea air is good for the appetite.’

Especially when done supporting operational readiness across the Pacific and Indian oceans.

Navy Lt. Lorna Brown, registered dietitian assigned to Navy Medicine Readiness Training Command (NMRTC) Bremerton, deployed for four months with Sailors and Marines of amphibious assault ship USS Essex (LHD 2) and the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit.

Brown volunteered her expertise for a pilot project looking at the benefits of deploying a dietitian ‘haze gray underway’ focusing on health-outcomes and operational readiness with collected data sent to Navy Health Research Center.
“I was looking at the efficacy of having a dietitian on board to improve the crews’ exercise habits, sleep habits, and reduce consumption of supplements, specifically energy drinks. Also see if I could change food habits, choices and behaviors. Those of us in the Navy Medicine need to know what the fleet does. Our hospital mission is different

than a ship command and their deployment challenges. Understanding that is important to ensure we can provide better support," said Brown, who calls Memphis, Tenn. home.

She offered nutrition classes throughout the deployment. Sometimes an entire shop would be present. Other times it was standing room only on the deck plates. Topics included clarifying different areas of performance nutrition, heart health and supplement safety.

"It was good even if everyone learned just one thing, then shared to help make a difference. As an example, a lot quit energy drinks or cut down significantly. They noticed that their sleep patterns started to improve. We don't realize how much caffeine is in a lot of food and drink products which can last up to six hours and affect someone's sleep," remarked Brown.

Brown considers most people inherently know what healthy choices are. At least in principle. But applying such knowledge into the normal daily routine, even on deployment, might prove difficult without specific support and guidance.

"When you're underway on a ship, you're really eating out three times a day. We can get into unhealthy choices. It's easy to get into the habit of adding cookies at both lunch and dinner. I recommend, 'you can have cookies, but it's probably not a good idea at breakfast, lunch and dinner. Every day.' We need to modify. Just have two cookies for dessert perhaps twice a week after one meal," explained Brown.

Brown also advocated the Navy's 'Go for Green' program - a Secretary of Navy directive for advancing nutrition efforts to provide healthier eating options, from ship to shore. The program uses a color coded menu – akin to a traffic light - to noticeably provide good advice for choosing what to eat.

"The color-coding system is a good visual. Green refers to high performance nourishment with less sugar and saturated fats to fuel our bodies and minds. Yellow is moderate in performance enhancing foods with less effective offerings. Red means a lot more sugars and fats and offering limited benefits. If someone is going through the line and chooses something red at breakfast, they probably don't need to do the same at lunch or for dinner," Brown noted.
The gratifying aspect for Brown was being able to just help others get the outcome they wanted.

"Those who attended classes, really applied what was shared and even asked for further explanation did improve

their health. One just texted his weight is under 200 pounds for the first time in years. He started at 227 over four months ago and is now down to 195. He's happy and feels comfortable in his own skin. It's his happiness, and also his health. That's the goal. Carrying extra weight is going to take a toll on ankles, knees, joints, and especially the heart. This is not about our goal for someone's health. It's about helping someone get to their goal," Brown stated.

Brown acknowledges the norm that most who deploy will experience weight loss. Yet there's a caveat to that.

"There may not be improvements in diabetes risk, managing blood pressure or cholesterol, but weight loss, whether wanted it or not, is typical," said Brown. "Maybe only a few pounds but that's usually what happens. When we get back, we tend to gain the lost weight back, along with extra. So it is interesting to have at least one report back on having no weight gain."

"Our jobs are linked to performance and readiness," continued Brown. "Those carrying extra pounds will take a toll on their body over time. It can also take an mental and emotional toll. You see this every Navy physical readiness test season with people stressing to make weight and pass a tape measurement. They have no problem with the physical portion but the body composition assessment can be stressful."

Yet does sea air improve a person's hunger? Conventional lore implied that was – allegedly – the case in the 19th century, especially in northern climes where big city air quality was considered unhealthier than seaside communities and being embarked on a seagoing vessel.

Fast forward today. Healthy vs. harmful options are not just up in the air. They're potentially in that plate in front of you.

At ship or shore, a Navy dietitian can help make the best choice.

Bon appetite!

Navy MSC helps with supportive care for Alabama hospital caregivers

By Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer -- There's a hand-painted sign announcing 'Heroes Work Here' outside of Dale Medical Center in Ozark, Alabama.

The personalized statement is as much a reference to the over-worked staff as it is to the U.S. Navy Medicine team who deployed there in early September, 2021.

A active duty team of nurses, providers and hospital corpsmen has been sent into Alabama as part of continued Department of Defense COVID response operations in conjunction with Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to offer support to help deal with the spread of COVID.

"We're part of DoD's ongoing COVID operations to support FEMA and the state of Alabama," said Lt. Cmdr. Andrew Rutledge, [usually] stationed at Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Unit Everett. "We're all proud to be part of the whole-of-government response and increase the medical capacity to care for COVID patients that have taxed local community assets."

According to local reports, hospitals throughout southwest Alabama are trying to accommodate providing care for patients beyond normal intensive care unit (ICU) capacity. Just two days before the Navy medicine team arrived, approximately 2,775 new patients were admitted for care across the state. Many of these hospitalizations are attributed to the Delta variant of the virus.

Vernon Johnson, the Dale Medical Center chief executive officer, delivered a stark reminder on the current concerns of an overwhelmed staffing trying to stop the spread of the pandemic and deal with increased COVID cases.

"Now's not the time to have a heart attack or a major car wreck, or something serious because there is nowhere to send you," said Johnson while addressing local media outlets.

The Navy medicine response team arrived Sept. 6, 2021 to relieve pressure on the hospital and its staff. There are 16 from Naval Medical Center San Diego, two from Navy Hospital Twentynine Palms, one from Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton and four from Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command (NMRTC) Bremerton; Lt. Cmdr. Andrew C. Rutledge, Lt. Candice Carter, Lt. Adeline Guina and Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Tessa Hazard,

one of two corpsmen with specialized skills as respiratory therapists .

“Our job is to support FEMA and the state of Alabama to provide medical assets in the COVID response,” said Rutledge, a 16-year Navy Medical Service Corps officer from Sarasota, Florida.

Rutledge, as Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Unit Everett officer in charge, is handling operations officer responsibilities to assist coordination of the daily operations for both military and community medical assets to ensure the mission is accomplished.

“I will assist the OIC in administrative and operational duties to maximize our clinical staff’s proficiency in patient care,” Rutledge said. “I’m thrilled to be supporting my fellow citizens and to help alleviate suffering from the pandemic.”

Rutledge and others began their mission with a familiarization briefing to learn the local hospital guidelines and mission, background information and insight on the local surrounding community. Four days after their arrival, they began working side-by-side with their civilian colleagues.

Twelve hour days – at minimum – are now the norm for the team. They’ve been helping provide care for COVID and non-COVID cases in the ICU, multi service unit and emergency room. The ICU, being full, is the busiest. When a bed does open up, it is quickly filled. Dale Medical Center has all but rolled out the welcome mat in their appreciation for the DoD medical professionals.

“They have been outstanding and extremely thankful for our help. We are enjoying a lot of southern hospitality,” said Rutledge, noting that all Navy personnel have been adaptable in fitting into their new working environment.

“Although not the same as where many of the team members come from, the Sailor’s prior experiences in many different medical treatment facilities and deployments in unique environments over the years make adaptation more of the norm for us,” Rutledge continued. “Many of the staff have been working at Dale Medical Center for 30 years or more. Our goal is to acclimate to their schedule and be like them as much as we can in how they support their community.”

There are five military bases in Alabama, including Fort Rucker located in Dale County, but none belonging to the Department of the Navy. As such, the Navy uniform and insignia have caught the attention of the locals.

“When we have had the opportunity to have meals and such while in uniform in the local area, our staff have been well received and thanked for their service both for what they normally do and what they are doing today” said Rutledge. “In speaking with the manager at the Dairy King who noticed our uniforms, she commented her thanks and how folks in her town really need the help and how much it has affected the community,”

As in any deployment, there are some days which are more trying than others. For over a year and half, dealing with the pandemic has taxed many, if not all, in most clinical settings. Rutledge affirms he understands the adversity and complexity the Dale Medical Center staff has had to handle, yet still they persevere in caring for those in need.

“Seeing the loss that many of the local staff have had to endure these past 18 months, and the challenge ahead in preventing more has been difficult for them,” observed Rutledge, adding that it has been gratifying to see Navy medicine working well alongside the hospital and “strong Alabama National Guard support.”

The Navy medicine team’s mission is open-ended with no definitive end date.

Yet.

“Our team is very honored, humbled and we're excited to be part of this holistic approach to responding to the crisis. We look forward to working alongside the Dale Medical Center staff, providing medical support and treatment to our fellow Americans in this local community during this time of need,” said Cmdr. Maggie Parks, Naval Medical Center San Diego Industrial Hygiene department head, and team lead.

I Am Navy Medicine – Lt. Daniel St. Clair, Clinical Psychologist – at NMRTC Bremerton

By Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer -- It was through an internship that Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command (NMRTC) Bremerton's junior officer of the quarter – and Medical Service Corps officer - began his Navy career.

Lt. Daniel St. Clair, from San Jose, Calif., had decided that his top choice for internship and residency in clinical psychology was at Naval Medical Center San Diego, which he completed in 2018.

Being part of Navy Medicine also seemed to offer the most interesting prospects in his chosen field.

"The diversity of career opportunities within the Navy, [and a] chance to expose my family to a variety of cultures and experiences they would not necessarily receive otherwise," said St. Clair, who graduated from Valley Christian High School in 2000, followed by Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo in 2006, with his Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, and Master of Arts in Spiritual formation and Soul Care in 2011, M.A. in Psychology in 2015 and Psy.D (doctor of psychology) in Psychology in 2018 from Biola University.

Four years – and counting – later, St. Clair is Mental Health division officer, Substance Abuse Rehabilitation Program (SARP) director, and clinical psychologist at NMRTC Bremerton.

"I have always been interested in people. Interested in why they think or act in various ways. This was true in my own life. I wanted to better understand and makes sense of my own experience. I worked in social services for many years, wanted to have more tools to help those that were struggling. Felt I didn't or could help in ways they needed. Sought psychology as a profession to better understand the human condition and provide effective ways to help people heal and thrive in life," St. Clair said.

St. Clair and NMRTC Bremerton's Mental Health department provide a wide array of behavioral health services, which includes around-the-clock individual and group consultation.

Alongside with his leadership role, he also manages a panel of patients, and is responsible for sustaining the psychological resiliency and mental readiness of military members through the delivery of high-quality, evidence-based treatments.

In response to the global pandemic, St. Clair helped lead Mental Health and SARP on converting their care delivery model from 100 percent face-to-face to 93 percent virtual care through both telephonic and video-assisted modalities. The clinic was the first to author and execute a standard operating procedure that ensured the safe delivery of virtual care. Their lessons learned laid

the groundwork for delivering video-assisted care across numerous ambulatory care clinics and throughout the Military Health System Puget Sound Market.

“We transitioned fairly quickly to virtual platforms that allowed us to maintain services. We had to learn (often by trial and error) what worked and what didn’t in reaching patients through the virtual platform. Behavioral health is a highly relational service. Not being able to be in person was difficult. Much of what we do and understand is communicated through nonverbals. It was a learning curve for us as clinicians but also for our patients,” St. Clair said.

As a result of his initiative and commitment to the well-being of Sailors and Marines, he was recently recognized as the command’s junior officer of the quarter.

“This recognition is very little about me or my achievements. It really is a recognition of those that have helped and contributed to my growth and development professionally and personally. I stand on the shoulders of giants. It’s their work in my life that is being reflected here,” St. Clair said, acknowledging that his role as a licensed clinical psychologist and division officer of SARP is crucial to behavioral health and wellness for those in need.

“As much as we try to overcome it, there is still a stigma attached to behavioral health. In my role, I try to normalize the truth that each of us struggles. Each of us have been hurt. We are all human. We need one another. We heal and overcome through relationship with one another. That is where I come in. I try to offer a space where people can simply be. With all their struggles. With all their hurt,” explained St. Clair, noting that his role in SARP – which cared for approximately 6,700 patients last year - is predicated on supporting those in need.

“I help men and women struggling with substance use better understand themselves, the role substances have held in their life, and how it has been/will continue to affect them,” added St. Clair. “I help them find the tools to live a life of sobriety. As SARP director my goal is to help them take control of their life, to see the choices they have and help them achieve the life they desire.”

St. Clair was also specifically selected to deploy onboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN-71) which returned from a five-month deployment in May into the Western Pacific, on the heels of a lengthy 2020 deployment impacted by a COVID-19 outbreak.

He provided acute care, routine care, inpatient care and crisis response mental health services in support for four commands, nine squadrons, and over 5,500 service members.

“I was an individual augment aboard for half the deployment. It was an incredible experience being shoulder to shoulder with the men and women who put themselves out there day-in and day-out. My part was caring for the fleet. I provided psychological services to those who were struggling with behavioral health issues. I provided crisis interventions and also psychoeducation for commands. I assisted the ship psychologist with dispositioning. I spent a lot of time really attempting to help the Sailors settle into the deployment and engage in the resiliency they already had,” related St. Clair.

When asked to sum up his experience with Navy Medicine in one sentence, St. Clair replied, “Grateful for the opportunities to know our Sailors.”

I Am Navy Medicine – Lt. Caitlin Sleight, clinical psychologist - at NMRTC Bremerton

By Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer – The junior officer of the quarter at for Navy Medicine Readiness Training Command (NMRTC) Bremerton admittedly could not have envisioned her current status in Navy Medicine.

Until it became a career-defining reality.

Lt. Caitlin Sleight, clinical psychologist, division officer and Marine Corps Security Force Battalion Psychology Liaison for NMRTC Bremerton's Mental Health Department, was recently selected as the command's Junior Officer of the Quarter (JOOQ).

"It is an honor to be selected as the command's JOOQ. It demonstrates how our leadership highlights the effort of all who are supporting our warfighters mentally and physically," said Sleight, noting the significance of being selected. "I simply feel grateful for having a command that understands the importance of collaboration, compassion, competence, and acknowledging hard-work and dedication to Navy Medicine."

With the Military Health System (MHS) recently recognizing June as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Awareness Month, as well as Men's Health Month – men are 24 percent less likely to visit the doctor than women – Sleight's expertise as a clinical psychologist is an apt paradigm of the importance attached to mental health and wellness by Navy Medicine and MHS.

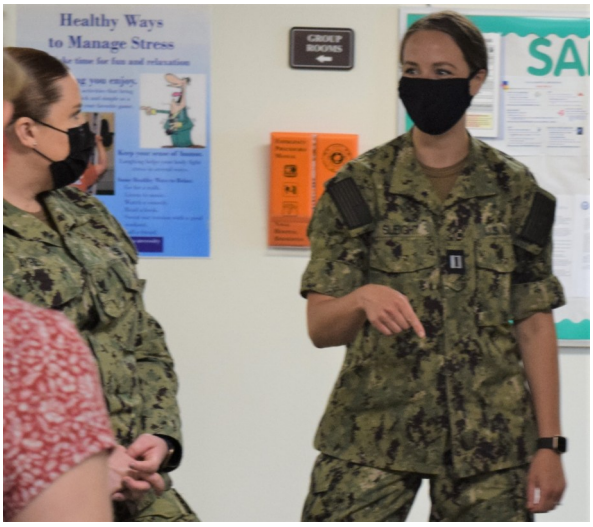
"Paying attention to our behavioral health is an important aspect of overall health. It is the foundation of warrior toughness and resiliency for service members. As warfighters, our greatest strengths are our ability to regulate, modulate and tolerate biopsychosocial stressors amidst the unique stressors of an operational environment," explained Sleight.

Her path to becoming a naval officer began in Willington, Connecticut, as a E.O. Smith High School, Storrs, 2006 graduate. She then achieved her B.A. in Psychology with a research concentration; Minor in Neuroscience -2010 from University of Connecticut, followed by graduate school at Albert Einstein College of Medicine's Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology in New York City with a Ph.D. Clinical Psychology- Health Emphasis and focus in Neuropsychology-2019. She has been part of Navy Medicine since 2018.

"My career began in 2018 when I interviewed for Walter Reed National Military Medical Center's Clinical Psychology Residency Program. It was my top choice out of the 15 other residency programs, none of which were military. On our psychology 'residency match day,' I matched with WRNMMC as their top choice as well, and the rest is history. I commissioned as an officer two months later and began my journey," related Sleight, noting that although growing up there was a degree of familiarity with the Navy fostered from her grandfather's WWII service, she could not have predicted actually becoming a commissioned naval officer, especially after six long years of graduate school.

"I had originally foreseen myself working as a clinical neuropsychologist at a VA hospital in New York City for the rest of my career. My specialty in graduate school was within neuropsychology/health psychology and applying my training to a veteran patient population with complex cognitive, physiological, emotional, and behavioral profiles seemed like the perfect fit. It wasn't until my lab mate in graduate school – Lt. Cmdr. Noah Epstein - began discussing the unique opportunities Navy Medicine could offer that I considered shifting my focus to working with an active duty population. Navy Medicine within the context of clinical psychology intersected all of my interests at once; an opportunity to build upon leadership skills; a sense of adventure; and

practically applying my years of study to bolster and build upon the psychological resiliency of the men and women who sacrifice so much for our country," Sleight said.



Sleight was raised in a small, rural Connecticut town, having to bus over to the neighboring town to attend school. Her parents and older sister were all English aficionadas, with both parents pursuing careers in journalism. Her parents, and upbringing, had a profound influence not only scholastically, but also in helping to form her own self-determination, discipline and dedication to tasks at hand. By the time she enrolled in college, it was at the sophomore level. But in the midst of that initial year, her commitment to her chosen field took on a heightened sense of importance.

"My personal investment within health psychology came mid-way freshman year, when I learned of my mother's stage III breast cancer diagnosis. While I contended with uncertainty of life awaiting the end of my mother's treatment, I observed how the disease so clearly demonstrated interconnectedness between physical, mental and cognitive wellness. Despite my mother's survivorship, her struggle to reclaim quality of life after cancer was apparent. Watching my mother transform from her most vibrant to her most vulnerable self ignited my determination to help others reclaim their functioning," shared Sleight.

"As I continue to advance forward in my career in Navy Medicine, I am reminded of my mother's unwavering commitment to her health and family with no guarantee of respite," continued Sleight. "It is with her in mind that I am inspired every day to be the best leader and clinician I can be."

The pandemic has presented additional challenges throughout Navy Medicine and the MHS, and Sleight's position as a clinical psychologist has been integral to providing support to others in need.

"As a Navy clinical psychologist amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, we collectively faced world-wide isolation, death, rapid change, and global uncertainty of the future. Our sailors were isolated aboard ships for months at a time, isolated from families, friends and sometimes unable to visit home to formally mourn the loss of a loved one because of travel restrictions. During a pandemic or not, our role is integral in facilitating the processing of complex emotions that can result from grief, death and dying," said Sleight.

Sleight's work aligns with the Navy surgeon general priority on operational readiness, and the core mission of ensuring force medical readiness by a ready medical force. Her duty directly contributes towards that standard.

"Psychological readiness is essential in maintaining operational readiness. My duty as a Navy psychologist is to target treatment at primary, secondary and tertiary care level, to both prevent illness and facilitate recovery so that our sailors and marines are both prepared to face adversity and stressors or return fit for full duty after a period of treatment," stressed Sleight.

Sleight attests being selected as the command's JOOQ is not solely based on individual appreciation as much as overall recognition for the entire Mental Health Department.

"As part of the mental health family, any success that any of our team members achieve is a success for all of us. We rely heavily upon one another, officers, enlisted and civilians alike. Our relentless perseverance as a clinic is constantly improving upon our culture of excellence and innovation. My selection is also an acknowledgment that the Mental Health Department continues to deliver agile support to our joint force population, all the while empowering and lifting one another up," Sleight said.

When asked what the best part of her career has been so far, Sleight replied, "The indescribable bond and friendships made with others impacting positive change in Navy Medicine. Being part of Navy Medicine means I have been given the opportunity to be part of something bigger than myself, and that I'm afforded the opportunity to help others and give back to my country."

From Shoulder Boards to Shoulder Pads – Navy MSC Officer helps lead the way

By Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs officer -- For Navy Lt. Mark Fisher, wearing a uniform as an immovable force against a determined foe was just part of growing up.

He's donning a decidedly different kind of uniform now - as part of Navy Medicine- helping to block the spread of COVID-19 as well as support operational readiness.

The former Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) Blue Raider has replaced his shoulder pads after a stellar collegiate football career with shoulder boards as a Navy Medical Service Corps (MSC) officer.

"I played at MTSU for four years and was voted team captain by my peers. The position I played was right tackle. I was blessed to be given the opportunity to be part of the New Orleans Saints organization for a short tenure at center," said Fisher. "Some great memories I have were traveling to different stadiums, the intense preparation with my teammates, and the singular team focus on game day. I will always miss the camaraderie, the feeling of family and even the grueling days spent at training camps."

The Nashville, Tenn. native graduated from Goodpasture High School in 2007 and MTSU in 2011 with a bachelor's degree in Pre-Medicine. He was also a four-year letterman on the gridiron. He was an All-Sun Belt Conference on the field and recognized for several academic awards in the classroom. As a right tackle standing 6'3" at a playing weight of 277 pounds, Fisher was described as the 'best all-around lineman on the team, an intelligent player, great leadership and an all-league-type performer.'

Fisher's Navy career began when he was approached by a recruiter in Nashville.

“She had just helped my brother get back into the military. At the time, the numbers of new Healthcare Administrators (HCA) were at one or two per year, making it very competitive. I was just about to start my Master in Business Administration (MBA) in Healthcare Administration and planned to join after I completed. The rest was history,” related Fisher.

After being accepted in the United States Navy, he received orders to NHB to be the Deputy Chief Information Officer (CIO).

“I was mentored by one of the most respectable CIOs in the Navy Information Technology community, Mr. Patrick Flaherty. I was in that role for a year then deployed to Afghanistan for approximately 10 months to serve as the CIO,” Fisher said, recently returned from his time at the NATO Role III Multinational hospital at Kandahar Air Field, Afghanistan.
As CIO of the hospital in the war-torn southern region of a land long wracked by continuous conflict, Fisher took challenges – large and small, personal and professional – as one might expect of a offense lineman; head on.

““My contribution was to ensure that our war fighters had 24/7 communication lines and real time data during medical needs. Expanding the IT infrastructure to reach our war fighters throughout all parts of Afghanistan was a challenge and it was gratifying being able to support them on the front lines,” said Fisher.

His current role is as legal officer at NHB/Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command Bremerton and Operational Support Officer (OSO) liaison for Navy Reservists.

Fisher’s interest in a career with Navy Medicine is rooted in family.

“My grandfather was a WWII submarine veteran. He was the only survivor of his sunken submarine, USS Growler (SS 215). My brother is a Mustang [a commissioned officer who began as enlisted]. You could say that the Navy was always in my blood. I knew that, given the opportunity, the Navy could be where I could become a valuable asset in a tight-knit family with tradition and prestige,” commented Fisher.

Fisher was born and raised in Nashville and started playing football at age 8, playing competitively until age 24. He earned a full scholarship at MTSU, and considers himself fortunate enough to have his education paid for because of his physical abilities.

“I was accepted into medical school at the same time that the NFL was knocking on my door. I thought long and hard about which path I would take. I chose the NFL and declined my acceptance into medical school. I played for two years, going on and off the 53-man roster, and the practice squad for the New Orleans Saints. The lessons I learned from football are priceless, and have helped me in my post-football career. I learned how to tackle people and snap a leather ball, but more importantly, how to lead others, and the value of practice,” shared Fisher.

After his time with the Saints, he returned home and attended Vanderbilt University focusing on the Nuclear Medicine Technologist (NMT) program. Along with classes by day, he worked nights as a Special Forensic Chemist.

“After I completed the NMT program and become board certified, I was hired on at Vanderbilt where I worked for almost four years doing Nuclear Medicine, even helping with the behind the scenes informatics for their new electronic health record,” Fisher said.

During that time, he worked during the day full time and went to school full time at night to complete his MBA, graduating with honors, at the top of his class. Shortly after, he brought his unique background to Navy Medicine.

“When I first joined the Navy, I quickly recognized some of the similarities to my years of college and professional football. Football was a huge part of my life and it taught me many skills that I have translated to my Navy career,” Fisher noted.

He affirms that the skill level and necessary intangibles to succeed on the field of play in the team sport do translate over to being part of his command.
“The first (skill) is emotional intelligence (EI) and how I needed to reframe my way of thinking about situa-

tions, such as COVID. As a leader and naval officer, I can help to improve the way young Sailors approach adversity or challenges throughout their lives. In football and in the Navy, you have to build skills to manage stress and things that are out of your control in constructive ways, and learn to think ahead. EI is a prerequisite for leadership. It helps you to understand that it's not all about you, and to build better teammates and cohesiveness within the organization," explained Fisher, adding that another similarity between football and the Navy is the need for a growth mindset.

"I spent years as the captain, and had many years of blood, sweat and tears with brothers on and off the field," continued Fisher. "Early on I was told I could not make it in the pros and that only a few people ever actually reach that level. I refused to accept that I had limitations. I knew I was responsible for my own success. I found many people around me who had a very fixed mindset and it limited their potential. My role in leadership is to continue to provide opportunities and support my Sailors to achieve their goals. The world is constantly changing, and you must adapt to succeed and grow."

As a MSC officer, Fisher provides integral expertise in helping support the command mission of operational readiness and ensuring there's a medically ready force as well as a ready medical force, whether during a pandemic outbreak or not.

"I will be able to support our war fighters wherever the Navy needs me to go. As a HCA/CIO who has been forward deployed and integrated within hospitals/clinics, that experience will allow me to be more efficient in maintaining continuous operational readiness. I can look at situations through different 'lens' to think outside the box," said Fisher.

The best part of his career, so far?

"The friendships that have been built and being part of a larger purpose within Navy Medicine," attests Fisher. When asked to sum up his experience with Navy Medicine in one sentence, Fisher replied, "I have had the fortunate opportunity to learn from the best leaders and introduce those skills into young Sailors."

I Am Navy Medicine – and MSC officer – Lt. Shanece Washington

As related to Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs -- "I am Lt. Shanece Washington, Navy Medical Service Corps officer and Occupational Audiologist, Regional Hearing Conservation Program Manager at Navy Medicine Readiness and Training Command (NMRTC) Bremerton.

Washington has been in the Navy for four years and is originally from Colorado Springs, Colo. and Rampart High School 2004-2008. She is a graduate from University of Northern Colorado, 2008-2012, in Audiology & Speech Language Sciences, B.S., with her Clinical Doctorate in Audiology, AuD from University of Washington, 2012-2016.

"I am a direct accession into the Navy. I completed all of my educational training prior to joining. During my clinical doctorate training, I was offered a spot with the Navy's Audiology Externship Program, however, I had to decline the offer. I finished my residency training at the Veteran Affairs Puget Sound Health Care System, and made the decision to join the Navy upon my completion," explained Washington.

Washington grew up in a military family, and always knew from a young age that she wanted to work with military members or veterans.

"My father served in the Air Force as a captain and instilled a sense of responsibility and service to community in his children. It took me several years to finalize the capacity in which I wanted to serve my community," said Washington.

Despite her relatively short time on active duty, Washington has served on both sides of the Pacific, from the Far East to the Pacific Northwest. Navy Medicine has afforded her the opportunity to serve in Yokosuka, Japan, Chinhae South Korea, and now currently at NMRTC Bremerton, Washington.

That fatherly advice learned when growing up has also empowered Washington to take on a host of overlapping duties, which include Hearing Conservation Program Manager, COVID-19 Level 1 Triage provider, Occupational

Audiology department head, Controlled Substance Inventory board chair, Medical Service Corps secretary, Navy Sexual Assault Prevention Response program-victim advocate, and Voting Assistance Officer.

“All of my assignments have been exciting and challenging in a variety of ways,” Washington said.

According to Washington, the best part of her career has been collaborating with talented, passionate and forward thinking individuals who strive to a make positive change within the Navy.

“I’ve witnessed the value of intervention and the impact that prevention has on the quality of life of service members and their families. I started my audiology career reactively by treating hearing loss in veterans. Now I proactively try and prevent hearing loss from occurring in service members. Additionally, I serve as a resource to operational commanders and leadership to strategize appropriate interactions and feasible recommendations related to hearing readiness. This is a great gift that gives me purpose and motivation to continue this essential work,” stated Washington.

Washington’s duty as audiologist directly contribute to the Navy surgeon general priority on operational readiness and Navy Medicine’s core mission of producing force medical readiness and medical force readiness.

“The mission of Navy Audiology is to prevent occupational-related hearing injuries and increase medical readiness. Hearing loss can place members in danger, diminish oral and communication skills, and lead to ineffective command control with a potential for mission failure,” said Washington. “Hearing directly impacts the ability/inability to localize and identify sound sources in an environment. The vision of Navy Audiology is to ensure mission readiness in world-wide operations by optimizing warfighter lethality, survivability and situational awareness. We accomplish this through advocacy, outreach, training, hearing protection, medical surveillance, and treatment/rehabilitative services.”

When asked to sum up her Navy Medicine career in one sentence, Washington replied, “My Navy career has been the most challenging and rewarding thing I have ever done, and has propelled me to higher levels of responsibility that I previously had not considered.”

I Am Navy Medicine, helping stop the spread of COVID-19, Lt. Aaron Chambers, Navy Medical Service Corps

As related to Douglas H Stutz, NHB/NMRTC Bremerton public affairs -- “I am Lt. Aaron Chambers DPM (Doctor of Podiatric Medicine) FACFAS (Fellow of the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons), helping stop the spread of COVID-19.”

Chambers, originally from St. Louis, Mo. Mehlville Senior High 2006 graduate, and University of Missouri 2009 alumnus, relocated to Los Angeles, California to complete his undergraduate degree in 2014 from Western University of Health Sciences.

For the last six years, Chambers has been part of Navy Medicine as an active-duty podiatrist and is currently assigned at Naval Medicine Readiness and Training Command Bremerton.

Along with still providing specialty service to keep Sailors, Marines and their families, past and present, ready, healthy and on the job, Chambers has also been actively engaged in helping to stop the spread of COVID-19.

“The great part of Navy Medicine is that everyone understands that we have a common mission and a dedication to our patients and service members. This has resulted in a high level of coordination and frequent updates to our screening process. I am currently performing Level-1 screenings for all patients at the hospital, and if I see an area for improvement I’m able to immediately address it to improve the mission,” said Chambers, noting that the Level 1 screening involves triaging high-risk patients coming to the hospital, screening for COVID-19 symptoms, and directing patients to the appropriate level of care.

“If a patient is identified as high risk in accordance with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) criteria, they are sent for prompt testing. If an OB patient in labor is identified, I activate our OB-response team, enabling prompt care for the child and mother. Even if patients are coming for routine appointments or pharmacy refills, they must be screened for respiratory illness. Our drive through screening process accommodates over 300 patients a day,” added Chambers.

It has been a challenge during what's been labeled as the new norm, as Chambers and the rest of NMRTC Bremerton focus daily on preparing, responding and preventing COVID-19 at shore, on ships, in submarines, and with squadrons.

"Knowing that things need to be fluid in terms of management can be a challenge in this time, but trusting in our team to provide the best quality of care helps significantly," said Chambers. "This is an unprecedented time but our military really shines in management of acute events. Additionally being part of a smaller command allows me to know personally those that are at the top levels of leadership. When a new protocol gets established I know it's coming from someone personally invested in its success. I'd trust them to treat my family and I trust them in their abilities."

Chambers attests that patient response has been overwhelmingly positive as the Navy Medicine military treatment facility works to protect its people, maintain military readiness, and support the whole-of-government interagency response.

"Patients frequently comment to me that they are thankful that our team at NHB/NMRTC Bremerton is making sure our community is safe. Knowing that we are addressing their concerns and that the wider Bremerton area is safer because of it is very gratifying," said Chambers.

Preventing a pandemic might seem like a another branch of medicine far removed from orthopedics, but Chambers and his department have immediately responded to help handle the outbreak, along with still providing acute patient needs.

"Our Orthopedic department team demonstrates the best part of being in the Navy – the ability to rapidly respond to any challenge that faces us," stated Chambers. "Within a day of the COVID-19 response we had changed our clinic schedule to having covering providers while the rest of us were dedicated to screening and testing. We switched immediately to phone meetings for updates to decrease the risk of transmission."

Chambers' Navy career was really not the result of any early planning, relying more on happenstance and the willingness to make the best of what seemed like a good opportunity.

"During my last year of my DPM program I was on clinical rotations at a residency program in San Francisco. Two of the graduating residents were part of the Navy Health Services Collegiate Program (HSCP) and they were extremely inspiring to be around. They had high energy, confidence and leadership skills that I strived to have. They viewed the Navy not as a means to an end, but as a chance to grow in personal and professional leadership abilities. We became good friends and they helped me during my application process to the Navy HSCP program. Once I began residency at the VA Loma Linda Hospital in Loma Linda, Calif., I began my career with the Navy," recalled Chambers.

"The Navy not only allows for one to grow professionally, but take part of leadership abilities I would otherwise not have the opportunity for," continued Chambers. "I have served as division officer for the department of Orthopedics, leading the enlisted hospital corpsmen to advance in rank and ability and as well as the command duty officer, performing crises management like inclement weather responses and personnel issues."

Chambers has also served as project manager for a number of hospital-wide process improvement projects, such as designing and implementing a 'surgical passport' system for both orthopedics and podiatry.

"It is a clear, concise method to help patients obtain pre-operative labs and clearances, obtain necessary pre-operative imaging as well as ensure follow-up for their post-operative appointments and care," described Chambers.

Although the majority of his six years has been providing patient-centered care at stateside military treatment facilities, Chambers has supported Navy fleet needs during local sea operations.

"One exciting assignment I had was coordinating an educational clinic for shipboard physical therapists stationed on our carriers. I conducted a multi-day hands-on workshop to teach the physical therapists how to perform safe injections and therapeutic modalities for their underway patients. It gave me the chance to see how life is aboard a massive carrier as well as improve the treatment abilities of their medical team," said Chambers, noticing the difference in podiatry needs on a Navy warship at sea compared to at a shore-based location.

"Due to the demanding shipboard environment, we see more sports-related injuries than our civilian counterparts. Frequently, I am performing ankle arthroscopies and ankle ligament repairs due to the repetitive stress and trauma on a ship. Additionally, I see a frequent level of foot traumas such as Jones fractures or Lisfranc injuries that necessitate surgery to get patients back to full duty as soon as possible. But compared to the civilian sector, I am not seeing as much diabetes related complications as I would in the civilian sector," Chambers said.

As a Navy Medical Service Corps officer, Chambers is part of an highly regarded group considered by many to be the most diverse organization in Navy Medicine.

"The biggest thing to remember about the Medical Service Corps is that while we may have very specific professions, we are all in the mission to provide exceptional care to our patients. As an example, I focus on the foot and ankle for my profession, but if a patient is experiencing issues with other areas I am the first to advocate and ensure they get prompt care. I have had patients that have had urgent psychological issues, emergent OB conditions and others, and I am always ensuring they get prompt care and a warm handoff to the specialist who can help them the best. During the COVID-19 pandemic I've been working with other MSC officers, Dental and Medical Corps officers and we are all focused on the same goal. Frequently I am screening patients side by side with optometrists and physical therapists and performing duties that would ordinarily be outside of my scope," Chambers said.
Chambers asserts that the best part about his career in Navy Medicine is the support as well as the opportunity to grow professionally and personally.

"Navy medicine and the military has made me a more disciplined person and really challenged me on what I can accomplish. My family and I have definitely seen a positive change in my confidence, stress management and public speaking abilities. My patient care abilities have definitely expanded as well with having access to experienced, trained mentors to rely on for advice," said Chambers.

"Being part of Navy Medicine means that I can serve my country and at the same time improving care for my service-members," added Chambers. "Nothing compares to the feeling of putting on my uniform and going to work knowing I am making a positive difference in patient's lives."

With the Navy surgeon general priority on operational readiness and core mission of producing force medical readiness and medical force readiness, Chambers notes that if anything, the COVID-19 outbreak has shown Navy Medicine's commitment to helping those in need.

"The results speak for themselves I believe. During this time of crisis we are still functioning as a high-reliability organization. Our Sailors are still getting the care they need and if an external need for deployment arises we are ready to serve," said Chambers.

When asked to could sum up his experience with Navy Medicine in one sentence, Chambers replied, "The best decision I have ever made in my life."

I am Navy Medicine: Lt. Megan Challacombe, Navy Physician Assistant

As related to Naval Hospital Bremerton Public Affairs – "I am a Navy Medical Service Corps (MSC) officer, stationed at Naval Hospital Bremerton (NHB) as a physician assistant assigned to Branch Health Clinic (BHC) Everett.

Challacombe, a Saylorsburg, Pa. native and Stroudsburg High School 2005 graduate, attended Misericordia and received her Bachelor's degree in Biology with a minor in chemistry and English, graduating in 2009, followed by graduating in 2012 with the King's College Master's degree in Physician Assistant Studies.

For Challacombe, becoming part of Navy Medicine is continuing her family heritage of serving in the military and wearing the cloth of her nation.

"My father was in the Marines and I always knew that I wanted to join the military as well. When I got accepted to Physician Assistant (PA) school I knew that it was the right time to join the Navy. Navy Medicine takes care of the Marines so it was no question I chose to join the Navy. I applied and got the Navy Health Professions Scholarship Program Scholarship for PA school," said Challacombe.

Challacombe is the primary care physician assistant for BHC Everett and oversees the day-to-day function of the clinic's Readiness Division, along with handing such overlapping responsibilities as taking care of the performance measure tool Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set, immunizations, physical exams, health promotions, and individual medical readiness and periodic health assessments for active duty personnel.

"A PA is a vital part of Navy Medicine. We can be stationed or augmented to several different facets of military medicine. We are attached to clinics, military treatment facilities, surgical teams, and as individual augmentees. PAs are so versatile. We are primary care providers for active duty, retirees, and their beneficiaries, specialize in one of the Duty Under Instruction education and training programs, or attached to a ship. There are so many different opportunities to practice medicine as a PA within the military," explained Challacombe, noting that the decision to become a PA was the culmination of a decision made much earlier in her childhood.

"I always knew I wanted to work in medicine since a young age. Lost a close family member to cancer and that sparked my passion for medicine. Every opportunity to volunteer or work in medicine I did throughout high school and college. In my undergrad I shadowed a PA in a dermatology office for a summer job shadowing opportunity and I fell in love with the profession," related Challacombe.

Navy Medicine has taken Challacombe to ship as well as shore locales. She has been stationed at Naval Health Clinic Hawaii, and deployed for nine months 'down range,' where she worked out of Tarin Kowt and Shindand,

Afghanistan, as part of a Role II Forward Surgical Team filling the primary role as a trauma team lead and surgical first assistant, along with providing primary care services. She has also assigned to the nuclear aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman (CVN 75). She counts her most memorable experience – so far – to being 'haze grey underway' on the Truman.

"Being a part of a carrier is an amazing experience. You practice within primary care, emergency medicine, and surgical medicine. Your job is to keep the crew healthy to support the greater mission. Responding to medical emergencies around the ship is a fast pace evolution that requires quick medical judgement and a team approach on how to safely get the patient to medical as the primary mission continues. It was an amazing opportunity on how to practice medicine," Challacombe said.

And the best part of her career in Navy Medicine?

"Being able to take care of the military population and their families and practice in several different facets of medicine that I would not have had the opportunity to do in the civilian side," added Challacombe.

Perhaps the biggest impact that Challacombe has made is helping to contribute to the renewed emphasis on readiness called for by Vice Adm. Forrest Faison, Navy surgeon general and chief, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery.

"As a PA in the primary care role my job is to keep service members healthy and ready to deploy at any notice which I am doing on a day to day basis. As the Readiness Division officer our division's primary role is to track readiness and assure service members are fully medical ready. We are tracking, contacting, seeing patients, and updating profile to assure we are keeping a fully ready force," Challacombe said.

When asked to sum up her experience with Navy Medicine in one sentence, Challacombe replied, "The opportunity to practice medicine within the Navy is a privilege and the ability to care for this population is an absolute honor. Also would like to take an opportunity to thank my husband for all of his support. A lot of what I do could not be done without the support of family."

2017 Navy Junior Pharmacist of the Year represents NHB

By Douglas H Stutz, Naval Hospital Bremerton Public Affairs -- For his behind-the-scene daily contributions, steady influence and hard work, Naval Hospital Bremerton's (NHB) Lt. Sean R. Szad was recently recognized as the 2017 Navy Junior Pharmacist of the Year.

"His specific accomplishments and contributions to NHB and Navy Pharmacy in Fiscal Year 2017 are significant. His outstanding motivation and commitment to excel are most deserving," said Lt. Cmdr. Dean Kang, NHB Pharmacy Department head.

Szad was acknowledged from a field of 65 nominees for the annual Navy Pharmacy Member/Team of the Year Awards and was presented with the citation during a command awards ceremony on Nov. 3, 2017, from Capt. Jeffrey Bitterman, NHB Commanding Officer.

"It was an honor to be nominated and a very nice compliment from immediate leadership. I know there are a lot of hard chargers in Navy pharmacy. I feel very lucky to have been selected amongst what must have been a very competitive group," said Szad, a Richmond Hill, Ga. native and University of Georgia 2015 graduate.

According to Kang, Szad has excelled as the Outpatient Pharmacy division officer. He led a team of 41 civilian, military and contractor staff members in the accurate dispensing of over 420,000 prescriptions to approximately 108,000 beneficiaries on an annual basis.

"His greatest attribute has been his compassion and care for patients and his ability to communicate with the patients and the hospital staff to ensure that patient safety and customer service are at the top priority for the pharmacy," explained Kang.

Szad was quick to note that being recognized by this award is more a reflection of the entire NHB Pharmacy staff than himself.

"I feel extremely fortunate to have worked with the team here, both within the pharmacy and beyond. I could name everyone in the command here as compelling support cast and still forget someone who has played a big role along the way. By name though, I have to specifically thank Cmdr. Eric Parsons and Lt. Cmdr. Dean Kang for the guidance they have given as department heads in my time here," said Szad, who has been in the Navy four years and assigned to NHB for approximately half that time.

Szad's specific duties read like a 'who's who' of Navy pharmacist responsibilities handling a host of duties such as inpatient and outpatient pharmacist needs, providing Coumadin Clinic support and managing various official pharmacological requirements.

As part of the Navy Pharmacy Patient Experience working group, Szad became a prime contributor in developing a method for tracking customer experience data that minimized labor-intensive processes. He also provided significant input to the new standardized Interactive Customer Evaluation (ICE) questionnaire system, a web-based program that allows NHB Pharmacy customers to provide feedback. The questionnaire has now been implemented to all Navy Medicine pharmacies.

Kang attests that Szad's primary achievements have been directly related to enhancing services to beneficiaries such as being a member of the Pharmacy Management Analytics Program. The program is charged with researching ways to improve pharmacy layout, design and workflow through all stages of prescription processing, all with the twin goals of improving patient satisfaction and staff production.

"His efforts have increased the ability for pharmacy to serve patients and improve customer service while decreasing negative perception. He demonstrated unswerving dedication to patient care with maintaining his full time staffing duties in his division. He also dedicated five days per month to provide medication therapy management to over 300 enrollees in NHB's anticoagulation clinic. He's a skilled manager. He has developed an uncanny ability to prioritize and superiorly perform his duties," noted Kang.

Szad was also one of four junior officers – and the only selectee in his initial tour of duty - competitively selected to serve on the Navy Pharmacy Advisory Board. He led a team to review and revise Navy Pharmacy Standard Operating Procedure to standardize the implementation and maintenance of Medication Drug take-back procedures across Navy military treatment facilities.

Szad also assisted NHB's Occupational Health department by helping revise training and qualifications on the proper handling, administration and disposal of hazardous medications. As NHB's Shelf Life Extension Program (SLEP) officer, he has led the effort in reutilizing available warehouse space to secure needed medications that need stable temperature and monitoring. He has worked directly with Navy Medicine West emergency preparedness coordinators to meet emergency-preparedness requirements for Convulsive Antidote, Nerve Agent (CANA) auto-injectors and update the SLEP inventory to save $1.65 million per year.

When asked to sum up his duty at NHB in one sentence, Szad replied, "I would summarize with, 'smooth seas make a poor sailor.' I greatly value the opportunities I have had to grow here."

It's that growth which is directly related to being selected as the Navy Junior Pharmacist of the Year.

I am Navy Medicine: Lt. Jeffrey D. Vorwald, Naval Hospital Bremerton Industrial Hygiene officer

By Douglas H Stutz, Naval Hospital Bremerton Public Affairs -- The Lancaster, Wis. native with six years in the Navy graduated from Boscobel High School in 2000 and spent time in the U.S. Air Force before finding his niche as a Navy Medical Service Corps (MSC) officer.

"As a MSC officer with a subspecialty as an Industrial Hygiene officer, I am part of a multidisciplinary team of outstanding naval officers in administration, scientific, and clinical healthcare specialties who provide world-class Navy healthcare to Sailors, Marines, retirees, and their families. Assigned to fleet support, I focus on the anticipation, recognition, evaluation, prevention, and control of occupational health hazards that arise as a result of, or during, the course of ship and submarine operations. Examples include watch-stander exposures to hazardous noise inside the main and auxiliary machinery spaces, deck personnel exposures to toxic chemicals during painting and preservation of ships, and crewmember exposures to heat stress inside the scullery, galley, and ships laundry," explained Vorwald.

When asked what he has accomplished so far during his career, Vorwald replied that his proudest achievements are not centered on him, but focused on those he works with and support during his job.

"The milestones so far are serving alongside my military brothers and sisters during deployments, including administrating the oath of enlistment to Sailors, developing our young Sailors into leaders, observing military promotions and retirement ceremonies, and saluting the first Industrial Hygiene officer to promote to Flag Officer, Rear Admiral Mark Bipes, Navy Medicine West Deputy Commander," Vorwald said.

Vorwald became interested in a career as an MSC and Industrial Hygiene officer with Navy Medicine as an outlet for his drive and energy.

"As a competitive athlete, I am always seeking the next challenge in life, both physically and mentally. I was an E-6 technical sergeant serving in the Air Force with a medical specialty as a bioenvironmental engineering technician. I just finished my Bachelor of Science degree from Columbia Southern University, and my first lieutenant, who was an Ironman athlete, challenged me to become a commissioned officer. To one up my first lieutenant, I was accepted into the Health Services Collegiate Program, earned my Master of Science degree from Montana Tech of the University of Montana, and joined Navy Medicine.

Although it was difficult to say goodbye to the Air Force, I joined an all-star team of MSC professionals, who I consider the greatest teammates," related Vorwald.

Wherever there's a Navy base, chances are there is an Industrial Hygiene officer and Vorwald is currently assigned to Naval Base Kitsap Bangor.

"I provide technical support to ship-board independent duty corpsmen in protecting and enhancing the health and safety of ship force personnel against a wide range of health and safety hazards that include chemical, physical, biological, and ergonomic stressors onboard ships and submarines. Occasionally, I get underway with the boats to measure Sailor exposures to hazardous chemicals and noise under intensive operations, such as weapon firing, vertical replenishments and damage control drills. Part of what I do is to recommend controls to minimize or eliminate the hazards," said Vorwald, noting he helps impacts Navy Medicine at the deckplate level by ensuring Sailors have a better understanding of the operational hazards and health risks involved.

Vorwald also adheres to the Surgeon General guiding principles of Navy Medicine by supporting readiness, health, and partnership.

"I would not say I 'save lives' but rather, I do my best at protecting our shipmates against adverse health effects caused by long-term, chronic exposure to hazards that can occur from fleet operations. This is best executed by monitoring and analyzing the extent of exposures to detected hazards and the use of engineering or other methods for hazard control," Vorwald said.

Vorwald attests that one of the most important aspects of being an Industrial Hygiene officer is being able to work in a host of diverse and critical settings.

"No other job within DoD serves on the front line of preventative healthcare services to our warfighters in so many diverse locations and environments, such as military treatment facilities, Navy environmental preventive medicine units, or with ships, submarines, and aircrafts," said Vorwald.

When asked to sum up his experience with Navy Medicine in one sentence, Vorwald replied, **"**the best six years of my life and still counting. Hooyah, go Navy!"

Navy Social Worker Shares Stress, Trauma Expertise in Malaysia during Pacific Partnership 2017

By Douglas H Stutz, Naval Hospital Bremerton Public Affairs -- During Pacific Partnership 2017 to host-country Malaysia, training was conducted in preparing and handling any emotional shock and psychological strain for not only victims of a disaster, but also first responders.

Navy Social Worker Lt. Stacey Uzueta, of Naval Hospital Bremerton's Case Management Department, was selected for the Malaysia engagement due to her expertise in stress and trauma. She spent one week in the capital of Kuala Lumpur and two weeks in the coastal city of Kuching on the island of Borneo.

In her official role, Uzueta primarily developed and delivered presentations that further enhanced the host nation's understanding on providing stress mitigation and self-care to first responders and caregivers. She also engaged in community health outreach, participated in subject matter expert exchanges and field training exercises.

"In Kuala Lumpur, I presented on the topic of mitigation of first responder stress and participated in subject matter exchanges with my counterparts in the mental health professions. In Kuching, I engaged in several community health outreach events. I presented and educated Malaysians in remote villages on topics of self-care, coping mechanisms and stress reduction. I also participated in a field training exercise which simulated a natural disaster of flooding, which is the most common threat in Malaysia, where I provided psychological first aid and assisted victims in accessing resources," said Uzueta, a Staten Island, N.Y. native.

Malaysia's has participated in Pacific Partnership for a dozen years, and was a host nation last year. Malaysians also have first-hand – and first responder – experience in dealing with the massive natural disaster that prompted the Pacific Partnership annual mission of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

It was on Dec. 26, 2004, that a sizable 9.3 earthquake caused the devastating tsunami that took place off the northwestern coast of nearby Sumatra, Indonesia.

For the most part, Malaysia was spared due to being directly east of Sumatra, which bore the brunt of the cataclysmic event. The northwestern province of Banda Aceh on Sumatra was the epicenter with over 100,000 people killed, thousands more missing and upwards of 700,000 displaced along islands of the Indonesian archipelago bordering the Indian Ocean.

Unfortunately there were fatalities on Penang Island, Malaysia – just 345 miles from Banda Aceh - where tsunami waves of 25 to 35 feet high slammed ashore, resulting in 68 fatalities, six missing and 8,000 residents displaced.

"As a mental health professional, we exchanged what services (to provide) from a mental health perspective, as well as the trauma recovery process. We also discussed methods of treatment following a traumatic event," explained Uzueta.

The flow of knowledge and insight was a constant theme during her time in the host-nation.

"I understood more clearly than ever the basic human instinct for survival and how resilient most humans are in the face of trauma. I also took away how very important it is for people to have support from others and how that aids in their recovery from traumatic events," stated Uzueta.

For Uzueta, her work with Malaysian health care experts has been the highlight of her two years in the Navy. The opportunity allowed her to deploy to the host-nation and showcase her capabilities as a Navy Medical Service Corps officer specifically trained as one of approximately 80 social workers in the Navy.

"I feel extremely privileged to be selected to represent the Navy for Pacific Partnership '17 Malaysia. It was so cool to meet the people of Malaysia, learn about their culture, their challenges, the differences and similarities among us, and just to be a part of the helping process," shared Uzueta, adding that her entire time there was underscored by professional interaction and personal appreciation.

There are specific memories Uzueta will continue to share now returned, including interacting with the Malaysi-

an military, Sailors of various ranks and backgrounds, other military forces that took part, and especially the villagers.

“It was an honor to be a part of this. It was particularly special because it was my very first deployment and mission away from the command! It really was a great experience for me,” explained Uzueta. “I felt like a celebrity! The Malaysians seemed very impressed with our military and expressed how grateful they were that we were there. Also, they requested a lot of pictures with us.”

Uzueta attests that the most gratifying aspect of being involved in the annual mission was being able to see the appreciation from those in need of medical care toward the providers and professionals helping them.

“There were those in remote villages who did not have ready access. They received basic healthcare that was not otherwise available to them,” said Uzueta.
Malaysia was the second mission stop of Pacific Partnership 2017, and activities there included humanitarian aid and disaster response preparedness exercises, such as mock rescue medical triage, along with subject matter expert medical exchanges such as what Uzueta provided, nutrition and cardiopulmonary resuscitation classes, civil engineering projects and community engagement events.

Pacific Partnership is the largest annual multilateral humanitarian assistance and disaster relief preparedness mission conducted in the Indo-Asia-Pacific and aims to enhance regional coordination in areas such as medical readiness and preparedness for manmade and natural disasters.

And the MSC shall lead them to the sun...Cmdr. Robert Thomas McMahon III, NHB Director for Administration—and Solar Eclipse Viewing Escort —ensures members of the command executive board don appropriate safe eye-protective wear to watch the Celestial Observation at 10:22 local Pacific Standard Time on top of the main hospital building, August 21, 2017.

Getting a grasp of occupational therapy...Lt. Angela Sadosky, Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy and Chiropractic Services Department Head, demonstrate tools of the trade in Naval Hospital Bremerton's (NHB) Occupational Therapy clinic, which is primarily an outpatient hand therapy service. NHB's occupational therapists provide treatment of a wide variety of upper extremity problems such as lacerated tendon(s) on a finger (s), carpal tunnel syndrome, tendinitis – inflammation – and fractures associated with the hand, wrist, and forearm (Official Navy photo by Douglas H Stutz, Naval Hospital Bremerton Public Affairs).

NHB staff members including Lt. Gregory Halol, showcased their favorite jersey in leadup to the 2017 super bowl ...